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THE REVELATORY ACTS OF GOD IN THE GOSPELS  
*How Divine Visions and Voices Promote Reverence for Jesus  
Within the Canonical Narratives*

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## Abstract

The following thesis examines the way “revelatory acts of God” in each of the canonical Gospels engender reverence for Jesus. “Revelatory acts of God” are disclosures of God by vision or audition (also called, “revelatory experiences”). Thus, any event in which characters hear a voice from heaven or see a vision from heaven is a “revelatory experience.” But what role do these accounts have in the four Gospel for engendering reverence for Jesus? That is, how do God’s direct interventions within these narratives inspire characters to respond to Jesus? The answer to this question is the focus of this thesis.

Scholars have noted the power of revelatory experience to “drive and shape” the veneration of Jesus in early Christian devotional practices. Hurtado notes the “demonstrable *efficacy* of such experiences in generating significant innovations in various religious traditions” (Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 65). However, one wonders what “faith-producing” role revelatory experiences actually have in the Gospels.

The Synoptic Gospels include revelatory experiences as a distinguishing feature of their accounts, with the baptism and transfiguration being two of the most commented-on passages of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. However, such revelatory acts of God are curiously rare in John prior to Jesus’ resurrection. This thesis will analyze the role of revelatory experiences for producing reverence for Jesus in each Gospel and explore the differences between the Gospels in how these accounts are employed. This research focuses primarily on the responses of characters to the revelatory *in the Gospel narratives*. The purpose of this thesis is to highlight the way audiences in the four Gospels are or are not “shaped” by such revelatory experiences and what implications these findings may have for the interpretation of each Gospel.

## Signed Declaration

I hereby affirm that I have composed this thesis and that the work is my own.  
The work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

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Mark D. Batluck

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Date

## Acknowledgments

Any improvements made to this thesis over the last three years are in large part due to the support of learned scholars and loving friends and family. The primary supervision of Dr. Paul Foster has been enormously helpful, first in my MTh and then in my doctoral research. Dr. Foster thoroughly commented on my chapters and was very responsive in my requests to meet. The secondary supervision of Prof. Larry Hurtado brought his years of work on Jesus-devotion to bear on this work. His incisive critique has been indispensable.

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My wife, Carmela, and my kids, Chloe and Joshua, are truly the highlight of my day when I come home. I look forward to the time when I tell them more about all that I am learning about God and the Bible. This thesis is dedicated to Carmela, my best friend and greatest advocate.

Mark Batluck  
April 4, 2013

## Abbreviations

AnBib	Analecta Biblica
AB	Anchor Bible Dictionary
AGAJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
ANRW	Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentary
<i>BA</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeology</i>
<i>BAR</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
<i>BI</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentary
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
<i>CBR</i>	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
CGTC	Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary
CRB	Cahiers de la Revue Biblique
CTL	Crown Theological Library
<i>EQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>ExpT</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
FB	Forschung zur Bibel
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
HNT	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
HTA	Historisch-Theologische Auslegung
HTKNT	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HTS	Harvard Theological Studies
IBT	Interpreting Biblical Texts
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JCTR</i>	<i>Journal for Christian Theological Research</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JPTSS	Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series
<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>

<i>JSBLE</i>	<i>Journal for the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSNTSupp</i>	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>JTSA</i>	<i>Journal of Theology for Southern Africa</i>
<i>LCL</i>	The Loeb Classical Library
<i>LNTS</i>	Library of New Testament Studies
<i>NAC</i>	New American Commentary
<i>NCBC</i>	New Century Bible Commentary
<i>NICNT</i>	New International Commentary on the New Testament
<i>NIGTC</i>	New International Greek Testament Commentary
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>PBC</i>	People's Bible Commentary
<i>PNTC</i>	Pillar New Testament Commentary
<i>PTMS</i>	Princeton Theological Monograph Series
<i>RSR</i>	<i>Recherches de Science Religieuse</i>
<i>RGG</i>	<i>Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart</i>
<i>SBG</i>	Studies in Biblical Greek
<i>SBLDS</i>	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
<i>SBT</i>	Studies in Biblical Theology
<i>SJSJ</i>	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
<i>SP</i>	Sacra Pagina
<i>SNTSMS</i>	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
<i>TB</i>	<i>Theologische Blätter</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
<i>ThZ</i>	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>TS</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
<i>TSAJ</i>	Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>VE</i>	<i>Vox Evangelica</i>
<i>WBC</i>	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WUNT</i>	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>ZECNT</i>	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
<i>ZKT</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie</i>
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>



## Introduction

“It is not usual for the Gospels to depict God speaking or acting directly. However, there is a point at which God cannot be represented by Jesus.”<sup>1</sup> This thesis investigates the significance of such scenes in the canonical Gospels, in which God interjects himself into the narrative through a vision or voice and commends Jesus to the witnesses (here termed the “revelatory acts of God”). The question this thesis asks is, “Do these revelatory acts of God inspire favorable responses to Jesus within the Gospel narratives?” That is, what responses do these revelatory acts of God in the Gospels illicit within the narrative with respect to Jesus?<sup>2</sup> In this way, this thesis sets out to analyze how effective God’s revelatory acts are for causing characters in the Gospels to revere Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

It has proven controversial to treat the canonical Gospels together instead of simply doing a Synoptic comparison or a study of one Gospel in light of contemporaneous

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<sup>1</sup> R. C. Tannehill, “The Gospel of Mark as Narrative Christology,” *Semeia* 75 (1979): 57–95, 75.

<sup>2</sup> I do not use “devotion,” “faith,” or “belief” when referencing characters’ attitudes toward Jesus because I do not want connotations of worship to be the bar by which this project assesses the effect of the revelatory acts of God. Thus, language of reverence, favor, positive attitude, admiration, enthusiasm, loyalty, affinity, allegiance, dedication, affection, and even commitment are meant to encompass all movement *toward* Jesus without specifying a stance of worship. In this way, the following thesis affirms but is distinguished from Hurtado’s work that makes cultic “devotion” the historical focus. This narrative study is more generally concerned with positive movement toward Jesus, whether worship is involved or not. See L. W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 3–4.

<sup>3</sup> This thesis shall take into account both the responses of unbelievers in the Gospel narratives (i.e., those that have not previously followed Jesus) and that of believers as they witness these revelatory acts of God and respond in one manner or another.

literature.<sup>4</sup> Fundamental to this decision is a desire to see the four Gospels interact on the same terms—similarities, differences, and all. John indeed has a very different “feel” to it than do the Synoptics, but all are the same type of work and all are written for the same communities of people, depicting the way the earliest followers of Jesus experienced him during his earthly ministry.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, this thesis contends that there is value in letting the four Gospels interact and, while letting them speak in their own ways, also using categories common among them all to best highlight the unique contribution of each Gospel to our study of the New Testament.

Hence, the inclusion of the Fourth Gospel in this study legitimates the thesis question, as the absence of the most well-known revelatory events of the Synoptics makes one wonder why John made the literary decisions he did. And yet, even without a full account of Jesus’ baptism or transfiguration, John still uses revelatory acts of God to shape his account of Jesus and his followers. Conversely, the Synoptic Gospels, although clearly related in some way,<sup>6</sup> obviously felt free to shape their own accounts of Jesus without being bound to conform to a source. Therefore, with each Gospel author making independent literary decisions, the question of the function of certain events is highly valuable. This thesis addresses the way

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<sup>4</sup> When presenting the “John” chapter of this thesis at the 2012 meeting of the British New Testament Conference, the Johannine group made quite a fuss at the definitions and categories used in this thesis, saying that these categories do not “fit” John’s Gospel, in which Jesus himself *is* God’s revelatory act and everything Jesus does and says *are* the actions or voice of God (I wholeheartedly grant Bultmann’s category of Jesus as “the Revealer” and lean heavily on his work in chapter 4). The group’s objections, however, were not able to answer to the fact that John’s Gospel still includes instances in which God the Father *personally* enters and speaks on Jesus’ behalf. Furthermore, their comments, following E. Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1968), 4–6, 19, did little to distinguish between the pre- and post-resurrected Jesus and articulate how the risen Jesus himself can be seen as a manifestation of God’s work in a way that is not true of his pre-resurrection form.

<sup>5</sup> R. A. Burridge, *What are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); R. Bauckham, *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> Although this thesis assumes Markan priority, neither this research nor its conclusions depend on the Two-Source hypothesis or the Farrer-Goulder-Goodacre hypothesis. Still, the assumed order of composition will be the order in which each Gospel is addressed. This thesis also analyzes each Gospel as each author clearly felt free to make independent judgments about what material to include and how to include it.

visions and voices of God function in each Gospel to engender positive responses to Jesus in those that witness them.

The above is a narrative critical thesis question, asking how audiences *within the Gospel narratives* respond to Jesus after witnessing a revelatory act of God concerning Jesus. However, neither the “experience” of the implied reader nor the intention(s) of the implied author will be analyzed except in places where the text explicitly states one or the other (e.g., John 20:30–31 addresses the author’s intention for the reader’s belief). In this way, this thesis adopts a basic narrative critical approach, which seeks to engage the world of the text and interprets each biblical book as “a literary work that was intended to be understood as a whole, rather than as a collection of pericopes each of which could be analyzed in terms of its probable origins and compositional history.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the responses of characters to the revelatory acts of God in each Gospel’s narrative will be the focus of this thesis.

### *Previous Research*

This narrative question arises out of the last century of historical-critical inquiry on religious and revelatory experience in biblical literature.<sup>8</sup> At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Hermann Gunkel marshaled the ranks of *die religionsgeschichtliche Schule* with his work on the influence of the Spirit in the writings of the apostles.<sup>9</sup> Gunkel’s focus on the experiential

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<sup>7</sup> M. A. Powell, “Narrative Criticism: The Emergence of a Prominent Reading Strategy,” in *Mark as Story, Retrospect and Prospect*, eds. K. R. Iverson and C. W. Skinner (Atlanta: SBL, 2011), 19. However, this thesis makes no attempt to develop narrative-critical theory nor contribute to narrative-critical research as a discrete method of biblical inquiry, therefore simply “narrative” will be used adjectivally in the remainder of this thesis. For a standard work on narrative criticism across the disciplines, see S. B. Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978).

<sup>8</sup> For an overview of the development in research on religious experience in biblical studies, see M. D. Batluck, “Religious Experience in New Testament Research,” *CBR* 9 (2011): 339–63.

<sup>9</sup> H. Gunkel, *Die Wirkungen des heiligen Geistes nach der populären Anschauung der apostolischen Zeit und nach der Lehre des Apostels Paulus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1888).

dimension of religion in antiquity offered scholarship a new lens by which to examine ancient literature.<sup>10</sup> The focus of history of religions research was on the experiential, and therefore Gunkel's work initiated an interpretive movement that viewed the emergence of the Jesus movement primarily as an experiential, rather than a theological, phenomenon.<sup>11</sup>

However, disillusionment brought about by the First and Second World Wars perhaps negated any focus on religious experience in antiquity that Gunkel brought to the academy.<sup>12</sup> Nineteenth-century Liberal Protestantism largely rejected metaphysical claims in preference for the historically-conditioned (i.e., "experiential") nature of biblical texts and yet the acts perpetrated during these wars stimulated a resurgence in metaphysical ideals.<sup>13</sup> Although Gunkel and his colleagues asked important questions that required attention, they overly emphasized the experiential against the propositional in New Testament literature, leaving a gap that would later be filled by Dunn and others.<sup>14</sup>

Still, the post-WWII decades illustrated the resilience of History of Religions research within the academy where the work of Wilhelm Bousset and the ongoing career of Rudolf Bultmann continued this stress on the "*development of Christology in early Christianity* which was clearly traceable in the New Testament."<sup>15</sup> That is, Bultmann asserted that "high" Christology developed in the crucible of religious experience over the decades after Jesus'

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<sup>10</sup> In the years after *Wirkungen* was published, investigation into religious experience blossomed outside of biblical studies as well through the research of scholars such as William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1902).

<sup>11</sup> Gardner, *The Religious Experience of Saint Paul*, Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament*, Leisegang (1919); Büchsel, *Der Geist Gottes im Neuen Testament*; Robinson *The Christian Experience of the Holy Spirit*.

<sup>12</sup> So, Barth's "theological" emphasis on Scripture.

<sup>13</sup> Batluck, "Experience," 343.

<sup>14</sup> J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975); C. L. Rowland, *The Open Heaven* (New York: Crossroad, 1982); See Batluck, "Experience," 345–54.

<sup>15</sup> See R. Bultmann, *Faith and Understanding*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 263, italics original in both English and German editions.

death. Therefore, it is unsurprising that religious experience would figure so prominently in the interpretive scheme put forward by its proponents.<sup>16</sup>

Other scholars have recognized the possibility that these allegations of Christological development have been prompted more by presuppositions than the text itself.<sup>17</sup> Still, the role of religious experience in christological development remained an open question as Dunn's 1970 monograph *Jesus and the Spirit* led a fresh exploration of the "creative force of religious experience."<sup>18</sup> The last forty years have witnessed a dramatic increase of research on the powerful historical effect of religious and revelatory experience on the early Jesus movement. Allison's 2010 *Constructing Jesus* asserts, "what led anyone to believe that Jesus was already enthroned in the heavens? Was this an inference from some other conviction, or did it arise through religious experience?"<sup>19</sup> Hurtado as well notes the "demonstrable efficacy of such experiences in generating significant innovations in various religious traditions. . . . What might have moved Christian Jews to feel free to offer to Christ this unparalleled cultic devotion? . . . It seems likely that those very early circles who took the step of according Christ such reverence would have done so only if they felt *compelled by God*."<sup>20</sup>

Thus, religious and revelatory experiences are now firmly situated in the panorama of factors that contributed to the growth of early Christianity, although scholars have yet to come to a consensus on the precise *role* of these phenomena in the growth of the early Jesus

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<sup>16</sup> The work of Dodd and Lindars in the years following WWII, however, showed how New Testament writers understood Israel's scripture to play a significant role in their endorsement of Jesus and his role in God's redemptive program. C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures* (London: Nisbet, 1953). and B. Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic* (London: SCM, 1961), cited in Hurtado, "Christology," 1979.

<sup>17</sup> L. W. Hurtado, "New Testament Christology: A Critique of Bousset's Influence," *TS* 40 (1979): 307, and M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism* (London: SCM, 1974).

<sup>18</sup> Dunn, 1975, 4.

<sup>19</sup> D. C. Allison, *Constructing Jesus* (London: SPCK, 2010), 247.

<sup>20</sup> Hurtado, *Lord*, 65, 72, *italics original*. Scholars have noted that revelatory experiences were an important factor in shaping Christianity in its earliest stages (see Hurtado, *Lord*, 70–73). See also J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 11–92, who recognizes the "creative force" of such experiences in early Christian communities. See also S.L. Davies, *Jesus the Healer* (London: SCM, 1995).

movement. Dunn maintains the view that “high” Christology developed over the decades and centuries whereas Hurtado uses revelatory experiences to explain the sudden and explosive growth of the early Christian movement.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the relationship between religious experience and theological formulation is still being explored and the correspondence between religious experience and theological development remains a matter of investigation. These historical questions are relevant for this narrative project because the dynamic between religious (and especially revelatory) experience and reverence for Jesus in the Gospels is what this thesis aims to explore. This thesis is not suggesting that historical developments mirror literary ones, but only that this *may* be the case. That is, if ancient texts “often have as their *raison d’être* some religious experience of author and/or of community,” then the “textual articulation” of religious experience in antiquity” is of utmost importance.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, it is the contention of this thesis that certain historical hypotheses require a higher degree of substantiation if they run against the grain of the data that is present in the texts themselves they describe.

Do any of the Gospels correlate God’s revelatory activity with the reverential responses of characters to Jesus? The hypothesis of this project is that the revelatory acts of God do not correlate closely with the positive attitudes of characters toward Jesus, although these events sometimes provide the context within which characters do respond reverentially to Jesus. That is, although the results of this thesis do not show an entire correspondence between the revelatory acts of God and the positive responses of witnesses toward Jesus, there is not

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<sup>21</sup> J. D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: SCM, 1989), 251–56. Hurtado, *Lord*, 64–70. I stress that Dunn rejects Bultmann’s notion that christological formulations in early Christianity were borrowed from contemporary pagan religions. He says, “The suggestion that Christianity had simply taken over fully fledged ideas of incarnation from more established cults never was particularly plausible, however impressive some of the individual ‘parallels’ discovered by History of Religions research at the turn of the century might be” (251).

<sup>22</sup> F. Flannery, “Introduction: Religious Experience, Past and Present,” in *Experientia Volume 1: Inquiry into Religious Experience in Early Judaism and Early Christianity*, F. Flannery et al. eds. (Atlanta: SBL, 2008), 2.

complete dissonance either. First, key terms and the methodology employed must be presented.

## Key Terms Defined

The following paragraphs present a working definition of three terms: “revelatory acts” of God, “revelatory experience,” and “reverence” for Jesus. The first two terms—“revelatory act of God” and “revelatory experience”—are opposite sides of the same coin: the first is from God’s perspective and the second from that of the witness(es). The third term describes the positive or negative responses of characters to Jesus after a revelatory event.

**“Revelatory act of God”** refers to God’s activity in disclosing himself by vision or audition.<sup>23</sup> The revelatory “acts” of God in this thesis refer to a visionary or auditory “action,” “event,” “testimony,” “statement,” or “activity,” by which God discloses information about Jesus. That is, any event in which immaterial, cosmic, or otherwise “heavenly”<sup>24</sup> realities appear or sound (e.g. an angel, God’s voice, darkness over the whole

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<sup>23</sup> M.N.A. Bockmuehl, *Revelation and Mystery in Ancient Judaism and Pauline Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 2, specifies that divine disclosures *by visionary or prophetic means* constitute revelatory experience. Visionary revelation is easy to identify in revelatory accounts, but prophetic revelation is more complicated. Therefore, I have chosen to use “auditory” instead of Bockmuehl’s “prophetic,” since, for example, much of what Jesus says in the Gospels may be considered prophetic revelation.

To engage with the current study, one need not come to terms with the precise nature or relative validity of religious experiences in the Gospel. Whether one considers RE’s a psychological or a phenomenological reality makes no difference. This study is simply concerned with the articulation of such experiences (Flannery, “Introduction,” 2). As Johnson, *Experience*, 62, says, “Religious experience, like all experience, is perspectival. This or that object is ultimate with respect to this or that person. Recognition of the subject and interpretive dimension enables us to speak about real religious experiences without entering into the endless and fruitless debate over the ‘authenticity’ of such experiences based on whether the object to which the person responded was ‘really ultimate.’” See also Kristensen, *Meaning*, 6–7.

<sup>24</sup> Bockmuehl, *Revelation*, 2.

land at the crucifixion, etc.) is considered a “revelatory act of God.”<sup>25</sup> God does not have to be personally present in the narrative in order for an event to be considered one of his “revelatory acts.” Thus, angelic appearances or visions in which God uses symbols to communicate (e.g., tearing of the veil) would also be considered a “revelatory act” of God.

“**Revelatory experience**” is any event in a Gospel in which a character perceives a revelatory act of God.<sup>26</sup> Thus, “revelatory experience” and “revelatory act of God” are virtual synonyms, the former simply referring to a revelatory act of God from the point of view of the witness(es) in the text.<sup>27</sup> As the term is used in this thesis, “revelatory experience” is not intended to imply that events in which beings other than God are disclosed (such as Satan’s temptation of Jesus in Luke 4) are not revelatory in some way, but only that *in this thesis* “revelatory experience” shall refer only to the audience’s perception of one of *God’s* revelatory acts.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> This is distinguished from the miraculous manipulation of “earthly” items. For example, the removal of the stone at the empty tomb or the tearing of the temple veil are not considered “visionary,” in part because no action is performed on the veil or the stone that cannot happen in other, “natural,” settings. However, darkness “over the whole land” or the leading of the star are considered “visionary” acts of God and are presented as cosmic events that do not happen in the “natural” course of time and space.

This thesis considers Jesus to be “supra-human” after his resurrection. That is, the Gospel accounts that depict his appearances to his followers makes an obvious effort to demonstrate he is raised bodily, and yet Jesus’ ability to pass through walls, doors, etc. is clearly beyond the limits of normal human existence. Therefore, the resurrection appearances are all considered revelatory acts of God.

<sup>26</sup> Dunn observes that religious experience is a topic notorious for its difficulty to pin down (Dunn, *Jesus*, 3). Similarly, F. Flannery, “Introduction: Religious Experience Past and Present,” in *Experientia, Volume 1: Inquiry Into Religious Experience in Early Judaism and Early Christianity*, eds. F. Flannery, C. Shantz, and R. Werline (Atlanta: SBL, 2008), 1, objects to the tendency of scholars to offer “loose definitions of ‘religious experience’” with reckless assumptions about *Verstehen*. Academics have put forward many definitions but with little success. The Society of Biblical Literature’s Religious Experience group is now working on a definition of “religious experience,” but completion of the effort is said to be a long-term project as the group surveys the field.

<sup>27</sup> This thesis distinguishes “revelatory experience” from the more general category of “revelation.” Obviously, there is significant overlap between the two terms. “Revelatory experiences” are fundamentally “acts of divine revelation by vision or voice.” And it is specifically these phenomenological events—revelatory events—that are the focus of this thesis. That is, in the grand scheme of revelation in the Gospels, how effective are “revelatory experiences” at disclosing information about God and Jesus to given audiences?

<sup>28</sup> So also, “revelatory experience” in this thesis does *not* refer to the experience of the (implied) reader. The reader’s response will not be analyzed in this project.

Usually explicit witnesses are mentioned in the passage. However, some events fit the definition of a “revelatory experience” and make only limited reference to the response of the audience (such as the



“Revelatory experience” may be regarded as a subset of the broader category “**religious experience**.”<sup>29</sup> Religious experiences in the Gospels are those in which *characters have some contact with the paranormal*.<sup>30</sup> Although this thesis focuses on the effect of God’s revelatory activity in commending Jesus within these narratives, the broader portrait of religious

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phenomena at the crucifixion in Matt 27:45–54; Mark 15:33–39; Luke 23:44–49). Even in Matthew’s crucifixion scene, which says that the soldiers respond to “the earthquake and the things that happened” (27:54), it is unclear how many of the stated phenomena these soldiers respond to.

<sup>29</sup> Scholarship has yet to improve upon the classification scheme set forth in Rodney Stark’s “A Taxonomy of Religious Experience,” *JSSR* 5 (1963): 97–116. L. T. Johnson, *Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), subtitles the work, *A Missing Dimension in New Testament Studies*. Some scholars attribute this lack of scholarly concern to past academic efforts that privilege the theological over the experiential aspect of religion. L.W. Hurtado, “Religious Experience and Religious Innovation in the New Testament,” *JR* 80 (2000): 184. Johnson, *Experience*, 2, suggests that this privileging was natural since the study of religion arose among those more comfortable with the “clerical.”

Scholarly attention is beginning to turn toward religious experience, however, as the value of such research gains recognition. An evidence of the growing interest in religious experience research is the formation of the SBL “Religious Experience” program unit, and their 2008 *Experientia* volume (Atlanta: SBL, 2008). Also, Hurtado has noted the unique role of religious experience in generating religious innovation. See his discussion, Hurtado, *Lord*, 64–73.

<sup>30</sup> This definition is adapted from S. C. Barton, *The Spirituality of the Gospels* (London: SPCK, 1992), 1–2, and is deliberately general to accommodate any contact with preternatural beings or forces in ancient literature, whether it involves “good” or “evil” beings or does not record the thoughts or feelings of the subject. Therefore, when religious phenomena occur in a Gospel and the response of witnesses is not recorded (e.g., the centurion in Mark 15 is not aware of either the protracted darkness nor the tearing of the veil), for the purposes of this thesis, this event is still considered a “religious experience.”

In a recent paper, I proposed a similar definition of religious experience drawn from Stark’s “A Taxonomy of Religious Experience” (M. D. Batluck. “Rodney Stark and the Gospel of Mark: How the Sociologist’s ‘a Taxonomy of Religious Experience’ Corresponds with the Second Gospel,” paper presented at the British New Testament Conference, 2010). See also Johnson, *Experience*, 60–67 and Stark, “Taxonomy,” 98, for alternative definitions derived from sociological research.

Definitions for “religious experience” and “revelatory experience” are varied across the disciplines. A brief survey of definitions in social scientific research illustrates as much. The following scholars each introduced their own definition of “religious experience” in the first half of the twentieth century: W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1902); R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry Into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. J.W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1917), 8–11, 136; J. H. Leuba, *The Psychology of Religious Mysticism* (London: Kegan Paul, 1925), 1; F. L. Strickland, *The Psychology of Religious Experience* (New York: Abingdon, 1924), 66. In 1958, J. Wach, “The Nature of Religious Experience,” in *The Comparative Study of Religions*, ed. J. M. Kitagawa (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 27–58, defined religious experience as, “a response to that which is perceived as ultimate, involving the whole person, characterized by a peculiar intensity, and issuing in action.” This definition was adopted by Johnson, *Experience*, 60–66. However, Wach’s definition is contentious at several points. Less than a year after Wach’s article, his associate C. Y. Glock proposed another definition, “all those feelings, perceptions, and sensations which are experienced by an actor or defined by a religious group or a society as involving some communication, however slight, with a divine essence” (C. Y. Glock. “The Religious Revival in America,” in *Religion in the Face of America*, edited by J. Zahn (Berkeley: University of California, 1959), 26–27.

experience will be examined at the outset of research in each Gospel.<sup>31</sup>

“**Reverence**” is one of several terms that simply refers to the audience’s response to Jesus that meaningfully takes into account what God’s revelatory phenomena say about him. (Other terms used as synonyms in this thesis are favor, positive attitude, admiration, enthusiasm, loyalty, affinity, allegiance, dedication, affection, and commitment, all of which are meant to encompass movement *toward* Jesus without specifying a stance of worship.) Thus, by “reverence” for Jesus, I refer to some degree of “ideological alignment” in characters with God’s disclosure about Jesus.<sup>32</sup> I do not require certain vocabulary or formulae (e.g., of obeisance or confession) to be present to demonstrate reverence, nor do I require responses of unadulterated commitment from the characters in the Gospels.<sup>33</sup> Thus, a demonstration of “reverence” in this thesis involves some positive understanding of Jesus following the auditory or visionary phenomena portrayed in the narrative.<sup>34</sup>

This thesis assumes that all four Gospels are written as “faith documents” and depict events that provide the foundation for such ideas about Jesus.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, this thesis researches the way in which the four Gospels use these revelatory experiences to accomplish this goal.

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<sup>31</sup> As synonyms for “revelatory act,” this thesis will use “testimony,” “activity,” “action,” “commendation,” “declaration,” and “affirmation.” However, “revelatory” will always be used for the reader’s clarity.

<sup>32</sup> I borrow these terms from D. D. Kupp, *Matthew’s Emmanuel*, SNTSMS 90 (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1996), 47.

<sup>33</sup> Hurtado, *How on Earth?*, 139–48, highlights six expressions of homage in the Gospels: προσκυνέω, πίπτω, προσπίπτω, προσπίπτω ταῖς γόνασιν, γονυπετέω, and τίθημι τὰ γόνατα. Particularly προσκυνέω in Matthew seems to have a cultic sense when used in reference to Jesus. However, the term is not used exclusively toward Jesus. Therefore, any terms of obeisance and confession are addressed on a case-by-case basis to determine if indeed such language amounts to a positive response to Jesus after a revelatory experience.

<sup>34</sup> See Hurtado, *Lord*, 4, for a discussion on “devotion” in early Christianity. I define “devotion” more loosely here to include any positive “movement” on the part of characters toward Jesus in the wake of a revelatory act of God.

<sup>35</sup> M. Hengel, *Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ*, trans. J. Bowden (London: SCM, 2000), 303 n. 662.

## Methodology

This thesis will first examine each Gospel individually to investigate the way God’s revelatory acts contribute to characters’ reverence for Jesus within the narrative. That is, each chapter will evaluate if or how God’s revelatory acts in each Gospel engender positive responses to Jesus.<sup>36</sup> Three criteria will guide this endeavor.<sup>37</sup>

1. The **content** of each revelatory act will be examined as to what the phenomena generally communicate to the character(s) in the narrative. Scholarly debate about the meaning of visions, symbols, and titles in the Gospels is unending and much valuable work has been done on these areas. Therefore, this thesis will stress the dominant emphasis of these visionary or auditory phenomena and will gravitate toward the consensus view, arguing only for select points that have not yet been adequately considered. Therefore, in the Matthean baptism account, the descending dove, opening of the heavens, and the voice from heaven will all be the focus in this section. The content of each revelatory act of God is first explored before characters’ response to these phenomena can be examined below.
2. The **response** of the characters in the narrative to the content of phenomena will

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<sup>36</sup> Before analyzing revelatory acts of God, each chapter will briefly discuss the use of religious experience in each book, the purpose of which is to situate revelatory events within their wider religio-experiential framework within the narrative of each Gospel. To accomplish this succinctly, a statistical analysis with a corresponding graph of the data is produced. These statistics are my own and are drawn using the following parameters: (1) Pericopes are generally left intact (taken as whole-units) when possible. For example, all the verses in the synagogue exorcism of Mark 1:21–28 were tallied as an RE. (2) *Interpretations* of religious experiences are not counted in the total of RE passages unless they occur within a pericope in which an RE is recounted. Therefore, the unpardonable sin pericope (Mark 3:22–30)—where Jesus does not perform an exorcism but explains what he is doing in each exorcism—is not counted because the passage does not relay the events of a particular RE. (3) References to *future* REs are not counted either. Thus, Mark 6:7–11 is not included, where Jesus sends out his disciples to perform exorcisms, but does not actually recount any of the exorcisms they would later perform. (4) Accounts in which characters *report* a religious experience are not included. Therefore, Mark 9:38–40, where John tells Jesus that others are exorcizing demons in Jesus’ name, is not counted as an RE.

<sup>37</sup> Although these criteria are not exhaustive, they are necessary vantage points for understanding the relation between these accounts and the emergence of characters’ faith in Jesus.

then be assessed. This thesis is “text-centered,” meaning that the narrative “world” described by the text is the primary focus. Therefore, the (implied) reader will not be addressed, neither will the (implied) author. Rather, the responses of witnesses in the narrative to the revelatory phenomena will be the aim of this section and the entire project.<sup>38</sup> For example, the fearful responses of the women to the angel at the tomb in Mark 16:1–8 will be analyzed and explained within this pericope.

3. Finally, the **subsequent context** will be examined. The purpose of this section will be to address the responses of witnesses in the context *following* the revelatory event. Therefore, the responses of characters in a revelatory event may be qualified by their attitudes toward Jesus after the revelatory scene itself. For example, the response of the three disciples after the Matthean transfiguration, in which they are rebuked for their “little faith,” will be taken into account in this section. This section may also address intra-Gospel parallels outside of the passage under consideration.

Once these three criteria are addressed, conclusions for this research project will ask the following questions:

- How do the revelatory acts of God in each Gospel engender responses of reverence in characters toward Jesus?
- Is God’s revelatory activity in the Gospels equally compelling for characters within the narrative regarding Jesus?
- What may a negative answer to the above questions say about the role of God’s revelatory acts in the Gospels for engendering reverence for Jesus within the narratives?

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<sup>38</sup> The “response of the audience” in this thesis will always refer to the witnesses within the narrative and never the reader.

The answer to these questions will be assessed at the end of each chapter and in the conclusion of this thesis.

## Outline

The first four chapters will examine the role of God’s revelatory acts in each of the Gospels individually.<sup>39</sup> Chapter 1 analyzes Mark’s Gospel, which places the baptism account only nine verses into the book. The transfiguration, crucifixion and resurrection scenes will then be addressed. Chapter 2 examines Matthew’s Gospel, which begins with the only accounts in the canonical Gospels of revelatory dreams. These dreams and the vision of the magi will be addressed in a single section, after which the baptism, transfiguration, crucifixion, and resurrection accounts will be covered in discrete sections. Chapter 3 begins with the infancy narrative of Luke’s Gospel, which will be addressed in a single section. After this, the baptism, transfiguration, crucifixion, and resurrection scenes will be treated in separate sections. Chapter 4 examines the revelatory landscape of John’s Gospel, addressing the voice from heaven (John 12:27–30) and the resurrection chapters (John 20–21). An excursus will cover the Baptist’s report of the descending dove in John 1:32–34. Chapter 5, “Synthesis,” will summarize the data from the previous four chapters and make inferences based on these data, both for how the four Gospels diverge in their treatment of the revelatory acts of God and how they agree. The “Conclusion and Implications” chapter will then broadly suggest

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<sup>39</sup> The chapter on Matthew is placed before Luke only as a pragmatic decision, and does not imply a commitment to any theory of relationships between the Synoptic Gospels.

I will also steer clear of efforts either to harmonize these accounts or to demonstrate that these authors presented contrasting views of revelatory experiences in their accounts. The fact that all four Gospels were endorsed by early Christians and that the plurality of these literary works was both maintained and championed makes their distinctive portrayals significant as well as their composite message. Therefore, I regard my task “as one of critical perception and description rather than systemic harmonization” (Bockmuehl, *Revelation*, 4).

ways that this analysis may help us better understand the Gospels and make implications for future research.

## CHAPTER 1

# Revelatory Acts of God in Mark

Although religious experiences make up more of the Markan storyline than in any other canonical Gospel, revelatory acts of God comprise only a few verses.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the Second Gospel neither contains a birth narrative nor an extended account of Jesus' resurrection. However, the paucity of revelatory experience accounts leads one to wonder how such events are deployed within the narrative and what relationship these revelatory experiences have to characters' reverence for Jesus in Mark's Gospel.

### *Statistical Analysis of Religious Experience in Mark*

The abundance of religious experience accounts in Mark shows the Gospel's preference for the miraculous.<sup>2</sup> Mark's four revelatory acts of God are fewer but seem to appear at crucial junctures in the Markan storyline. In the 661 verses found in Mark 1:1–16:8, 218 verses are devoted to religious experiences and only 27 verses to revelatory acts of God.<sup>3</sup> Thus, 33% of

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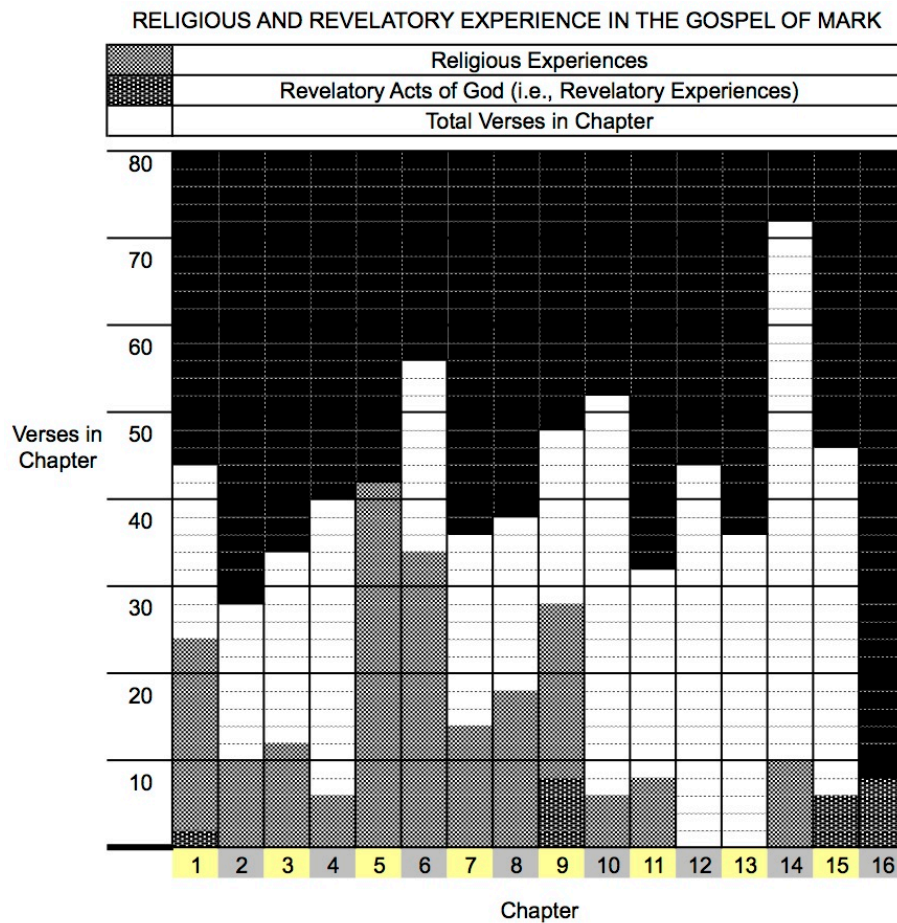
<sup>1</sup> The "Introduction" of this thesis defines "revelatory acts of God" as "God's activity in disclosing himself by vision or audition," and is used synonymous with "revelatory experience." "Religious experience" is defined as any "contact with the paranormal" and can be generally understood to include all miracle accounts.

<sup>2</sup> See the Methodology section of the introduction for a full explanation of the criteria used for including and excluding pericopae from these statistics.

<sup>3</sup> The "661" verse-count comes from a basic tally of verses in E. Nestle, E. Nestle, and K. Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993), not including the following verses that appear only in some manuscripts: Mark 7:16; 9:44, 46; 11:26; 15:28. Passages tallied as "religious experiences" are as follows: Mark 1:9–11, John baptizes Jesus; 1:12–13, Satan tempts Jesus; 1:23–28, Jesus exorcizes in the synagogue; 1:29–31, Jesus heals of Simon's mother-in-law; 1:32–34, Jesus heals and exorcizes; 1:39, Jesus exorcizes throughout Galilee; 1:40–45, Jesus heals the leper; 2:3–12, Jesus heals the paralytic; 3:1–6, Jesus heals man with the shriveled hand; 3:7–12, Jesus heals people who touch him and exorcizes demons; 4:35–41, Jesus calms the storm; 5:1–20, Jesus exorcizes the

the Markan material—one-third of the Gospel—covers religious experience material and 4% covers revelatory experience material. Figure 1 shows the distribution of religious and revelatory experience accounts in the Gospel.

**Figure 1: Distribution of Religious and Revelatory Experiences in Mark**



Of the 33% of Markan material that covers religious experience, nearly 70% of these accounts occur in the first half of the book. That is, Mark’s Gospel draws upon religious experiences (most of which are involving and initiated by Jesus) quite early in the Gospel

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demoniac; 5:21–24, 35–43, Jesus heals Jairus’ daughter; 5:24–34, Jesus heals the woman with twelve-year issue of blood; 6:5–6, Jesus heals a “few” people; 6:7–13, disciples’ heal and exorcize; 6:30–44, Jesus feeds the 5,000; 6:47–52, Jesus walks on the water; 6:53–56, Jesus heals those who touch him; 7:24–30, Jesus exorcizes the Syro-Phoenician girl; 7:31–37, Jesus heals the deaf-mute man; 8:1–9, Jesus feeds the 4,000; 8:22–26, Jesus heals the blind man in two stages; 9:2–10, Jesus is transfigured; 9:14–29, Jesus exorcizes the epileptic; 10:46–52, Jesus heals Bartimaeus; 11:12–14, 20–25, Jesus curses of the fig tree; 15:33–39, God causes three hours of darkness and tears the veil; 16:1–8, Jesus is raised.



perhaps to establish Jesus as one who is doing battle with the house of Satan (Mark 3:22–30). By Mark 10, religious experience accounts drastically decrease as the narrative progresses towards the crucifixion.

The importance of Markan religious experience is evident in the prominence of these events in the Gospel. The ratio of religious experience versus revelatory experience is informative as well. Revelatory experiences are important for other reasons, although they do not dominate the literary landscape of Mark's Gospel. In particular, Markan revelatory acts of God disclose Jesus to Mark's characters and yet the responses of these characters are mixed. This thesis analyzes the role of these events to produce reverence for Jesus in Mark's Gospel.

### *Revelatory Acts of God within the Structure of Mark*

The structure of Mark's Gospel has occupied scholars for decades, and primary organizing principles used are understandably determinative for the outcome.<sup>4</sup> Larsen, however, has found that geographical organization of the Gospel is the “nearly unanimous” choice.<sup>5</sup> This thesis bases none of its conclusions on any one particular structural model, however geographical ordering of Mark places the four revelatory acts of God at important geographical locations within the Gospel. In other words, each general locale in Mark is delimited by a revelatory event: the baptism initiates the first section in Galilee from Mark 1:15–8:26; the transfiguration marks the movement southward to Jerusalem from Mark 8:27–10:52; and the crucifixion phenomena and resurrection take place in and around Jerusalem

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<sup>4</sup> K. W. Larsen, “The Structure of Mark's Gospel: Current Proposals,” *CBR* 3 (2004): 140–60, 140, aggregates the years of scholarship on Markan structure and has determined that the following organizing principles are most common: geography/topography, theology, *Sitz im Leben* of the recipients, and “literary factors.” R. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus and Mark*, WUNT 2.88 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 124, also compiles the opinions of commentators on the structure of Mark.

<sup>5</sup> Larsen, “Structure,” 141, 43–44, shows that topographical structures of Mark work quite well until one tries “to determine sub-points within a section.” The first to initiate the scholarly move in this direction is E. Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Markus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1953).

from Mark 11:1–16:8. If these Markan revelatory acts of God closely follow the geographical movement of Mark’s Gospel, this may suggest that these events reveal Jesus’ identity throughout these key locations in the narrative.

## Revelatory Acts of God in Mark

Revelatory acts of God in Mark produce mixed results concerning the reverence of characters for Jesus, and the Gospel offers “little description of the inner states of the story characters” which creates a number of interpretive challenges.<sup>6</sup> Mark’s Gospel contains four revelatory acts of God: Jesus’ baptism by John (Mark 1:9–11), the transfiguration (Mark 9:2–8), the revelatory phenomena at the crucifixion (Mark 15:33–39), and the empty tomb (Mark 16:1–8). The following sections will analyze (1) the content of each revelatory act of God, (2) the response of the witness(es) in the narrative, and (3) the context subsequent to this revelatory act of God in the Gospel. This chapter will assess the role of Markan revelatory acts of Gods for producing reverence for Jesus in the Gospel.

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<sup>6</sup> Tannehill, “Narrative Christology,” 58. Mark’s characteristic brevity regarding the responses of characters to the revelatory acts of God may explain why so few have systematically analyzed these responses in previous work on the Second Gospel.

## The Baptism of Jesus (Mark 1:9–11)

Jesus’ baptismal revelatory experience occurs at the very beginning of the Gospel and makes grand claims about Jesus’ divine sonship, and yet Mark records no audience besides Jesus.

Hooker sounds an apt warning in her commentary as to the “idleness” of trying to squeeze the Markan baptism account for details it does not include, thus no audience (i.e., even John, who performed the baptism) should be inferred from the text.<sup>7</sup>

But the impulse to “squeeze” the text comes from the unexpected silence over certain supposedly “key” details. The tearing of the heavens, the descent of the dove, and the presence of the heavenly voice all take place with Jesus as the sole audience. Jesus’ own response to the phenomena is not mentioned until after the event finishes. The discussion below will analyze the dominant emphasis of the content, Jesus’ response, and the Markan context subsequent to the event.

### *Content of the Markan Baptism*

#### **1. The Torn Heavens as a Display of Divine Power (Mark 1:10)**

Mark’s tearing of the heavens foreshadows that God’s resources will be available for Jesus as he initiates his battle with the house of Satan in the coming verses. Mark 1:10 records a rending of the heavens (σχίζομένους τοὺς οὐρανοὺς), the verb “to tear” (σχίζω) itself being quite rare and graphic.<sup>8</sup> Marcus calls Mark’s choice of words “harsh” and “unusual.”<sup>9</sup> Σχίζω occurs only one other time in Mark 15 as the temple veil is “split in two from top to bottom” (Mark 15:38, Καὶ τὸ

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<sup>7</sup> M. D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, BNTC (London: A & C Black, 1997), 44.

<sup>8</sup> V. Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966), 160.

<sup>9</sup> J. Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, AB (London: Doubleday, 2000), 159.

καταπέτασμα τοῦ ναοῦ ἐσχίσθη εἰς δύο ἀπ’ ἄνωθεν ἕως κάτω).<sup>10</sup> Therefore, previous research and full-length theses have linked the tearing of the heavens in Mark 1:11 and that of the veil in 15:38.<sup>11</sup>

The section on the crucifixion below discusses in detail the implications of this textual connection. For the baptism account, however, the opening of the heavens generally indicates “a vision which reaches beyond the earthly dimension” (related passages in the Hebrew Bible: Ezek. 1:1; John 1:51; Act 7:56, 10:11; Rev. 19:11).<sup>12</sup> Commentators often compare Isa. 63:19 that says, “rend [LXX: ἀνοίξεις; BHS: קרעת] the heavens and come down—the mountains quake before you.”<sup>13</sup> Similarly to Mark 1:9–11 and other passages quoted above, Isa. 63:19 calls for the opening of the heavens and anticipates the manifestation of heavenly realities. That is, the tearing of the heavens implies that something cataclysmic is about to take place. Edwards cites the peculiarity of Mark’s language when saying, “[the tearing of the heavens] appears in Jewish literature for cataclysmic demonstrations of God’s power, such as the dividing of the Red Sea (Exod. 14:21), Moses’ cleaving the rock (Isa. 48:21), the splitting of the Mount of Olives on the Day of the Lord (Zech. 14:4), or the descent of the heavenly man in *Joseph and Aseneth* (*Jos. Asen.* 14:3).”<sup>14</sup> Also, the tearing of the heavens implies that Jesus has a special relationship with

<sup>10</sup> D. M. Gurtner, “The Rending of the Veil and Markan Christology: ‘Unveiling’ the ‘Υἱος Θεου’ (Mark 15:38-39),” *BI* 15 (2007), 293.

<sup>11</sup> D. M. Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew’s Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, SNTSMS 139 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1–28; D. Ulansey, “The Heavenly Veil Torn: Mark’s Cosmic Inclusio,” *JBL* 110 (1991), 123–25; S. Motyer, “The Rending of the Veil: A Markan Pentecost,” *NTS* 33 (1987), 157; H. M. Jackson, “The Death of Jesus and the Miracle From the Cross,” *NTS* 33 (1987), 23, 27, 31; E. S. Malbon, *Narrative Space and Mythic Meaning in Mark* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 187 n. 93; P. H.-Y. Ryou, “Apocalyptic Opening, Eschatological ‘Inclusio’: A Study of the Rending of the Heaven and the Temple Curtain in the Gospel of Mark With Special Reference to the Motif of ‘Seeing’” (University of Glasgow, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> France, *Mark*, 77.

<sup>13</sup> R. D. Rowe, *God’s Kingdom and God’s Son* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 131.

<sup>14</sup> J. R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 35–36.

heaven because heavenly signs are deployed on Jesus' behalf.<sup>15</sup> That is, Mark emphasizes the gravity of the scene and the heavenly significance of these events for Jesus.<sup>16</sup>

## 2. The Descent of God's Empowering Spirit (Mark 1:10)

The history of research on the dove motif in Jesus' baptism is extensive and this thesis will not survey this body of work because most of this research does not engage the questions of this thesis.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, scholarship has reached no consensus in this massive body of research causing France to conclude that there is no "ready-made dove symbolism at the time of Mark, and it seems futile to try to provide one."<sup>18</sup>

To be sure, dove similes are common in the Hebrew Bible and would have been easily accessible to the author of Mark.<sup>19</sup> But the banality of this Markan simile mandates that it be taken at "face value," with ὡς περιστεράν simply describing the *manner* of the Spirit's descent. The dove-like description of the Spirit would then simply refer to the motion of the Spirit on Jesus, not its theological significance.

As for the involvement of the Spirit at the baptism of Jesus, commentators generally agree

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<sup>15</sup> Rowe, *God's Son*, 132 n. 65.

<sup>16</sup> Ryou, "Seeing," 15, concludes, the tearing of the heavens assumes "a programmatic . . . significance in developing and shaping the whole story of Mark, setting up [a] . . . picture of Jesus' experiences at . . . the induction of his messianic mission" by incorporating this phenomenon in the experience. It is questionable if this revelatory experience is pivotal for interpreting Jesus for the remainder of Mark's Gospel when the experience is only alluded to at the transfiguration and (vaguely at) the crucifixion.

<sup>17</sup> In the appendix of this thesis, I interact with one of the more current and compelling proposals to explain the descending dove (the implications of which are not relevant for inclusion in the body of this project). The aforementioned proposal likens the descent of the dove in Mark to the descent of gods as birds in Greek literature. "It is not likely, however, that early Jewish Christians . . . would present Jesus in pagan garb. Jewish teachers were highly critical of pagan morals and myths. The idea . . . was repugnant." C. A. Evans, *Matthew*, NCBC (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), 41.

<sup>18</sup> France, *Mark*, 79.

<sup>19</sup> Ps. 55:6; Song 5:12; Isa. 38:14; 59:11; 60:8 Jer. 48:28; Ezek. 7:16; Hos. 7:11; 11:11; Nah. 2:7.

that descent of the Spirit is a sign of messianic anointing or empowering.<sup>20</sup> Mark uses the preposition εἰς to describe the Spirit’s approach to Jesus, which some have taken to mean that the Spirit enters “into” Jesus.<sup>21</sup> Although this is a grammatical possibility, Mark uses εἰς in other contexts to clearly denote movement toward.<sup>22</sup> Thus, at the baptism in Mark, Jesus perceives both the tearing of the heavens and the descent of the Spirit and as the Spirit anoints and empowers Jesus for his mission.

### 3. God’s Voice and the Validation of Jesus (Mark 1:11)

Although a great deal has been written on the beloved sonship of Jesus, scholars agree that the “beloved” status particularizes the idea of sonship for Jesus, making it distinct from other “sons of God.”<sup>23</sup> For example, Ringe’s argument that “beloved” is a reference to the Akedah, which is not explicitly mentioned in the Gospel, may stretch the Markan references to ἀγαπητός.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> J. D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-Examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today* (London: SCM, 1970), 27; A. Y. Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 149; L. W. Hurtado, *Mark*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995), 19; R. Stein, *Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 58; France, *Mark*, 74; A. Y. Collins and J. J. Collins, *King and Messiah as Son of God* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2008), 1–2.

<sup>21</sup> F. Hahn, *The Titles of Jesus in Christology: Their History in Early Tradition* (London: Lutterworth, 1969), 338; Collins, *Mark*, 149.

<sup>22</sup> C. R. Kazmierski, *Jesus, the Son of God*, FB 33 (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1979), 61. Mark 9:2 says the disciples and Jesus go “to” (εἰς) the mountain.

<sup>23</sup> Some take this verse as pointing to Jesus’ messiahship and others to his filial relationship R. H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 53 sees the passage referring to Jesus’ messiahship, even though he see the Markan voice as referring to Ps. 2:7. R. Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium* (Freiburg: Herder, 1979), 1:92 and Taylor, *Mark*, 162 take the view that Jesus’ filial status is the focus.

<sup>24</sup> Detailed interaction with M. S. Rindge, Reconfiguring the Akedah and Recasting God: Lament and Divine Abandonment in Mark,” *JBL* 131 (2012): 100–34, is included in the Appendix. To explain the “stretching” I mention above, Rindge looks at the three occurrences of ἀγαπητός in Mark (the baptism, transfiguration, and parable of the tenants in Mark 12:6) and attempts to connect each occurrence to the sacrifice of Jesus. In Mark 12:6, his case is strong. However, with the baptism and transfiguration, Rindge reaches to the surrounding context, sometimes connections chapters away, to connect ἀγαπητός to Jesus’ death. Kazmierski was the first to posit this thesis, yet does so in a more nuanced way. He also acknowledges the difficulty in

Similarly, focus on his royal messianism does not do justice to Mark’s emphasis on the sacrifice of Jesus leading up to the cross.<sup>25</sup> The great scandal of Mark’s Gospel is the fact that Jesus is the beloved son, pleasing to the father, who ends up crucified. Recent attempts to establish “Son of God” simply as a prop for Jesus’ royal messianism are unpersuasive.<sup>26</sup> As Kazmierski concludes, “No one pattern [of interpreting Mark 1:11] is sufficient to explain the background of the entire verse, and in particular the designation of Jesus as Beloved Son.”<sup>27</sup>

Instead, what seems to be the crux of scholarly agreement is that “beloved son” particularizes the idea of sonship, making it distinct from other “sons of God.”<sup>28</sup> God’s proclamation of Jesus does not only call him “son,” but “my beloved Son” in whom God is “well pleased.” Turner has noted that this term “often refers to an only child,” which is used frequently as such in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>29</sup> These qualifiers recorded in Mark’s baptism make more common notions of divine sonship insufficient for fully describing Jesus. Mark is therefore implying that ubiquitous notions of divine sonship alone will not adequately correlate to Jesus’ beloved sonship of God. This places the focus not on the meaning of “sonship” so much as the distinction that this divine sonship affords Jesus.

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determining if the Akedah was the “basis for Christian theology or . . . a reaction to it” (Kazmierski, *Son*, 56). With no clear reference to the Akedah in the New Testament, the latter conclusion is preferred.

<sup>25</sup> Tannehill, “Narrative Christology, 72–73 wisely takes the more general line of referring here to Jesus’ “commissioning” rather than specifying the degree to which this scene invokes messianic ideas.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Rowe, *God’s Son*, 242. M. Hengel, *The Son of God* (London: SCM, 1975), 63, resists the tendency to squeeze “son” language into any one mold.

<sup>27</sup> Kazmierski, *Son*, 61.

<sup>28</sup> Mark’s Gospel calls Jesus “God’s Son” nine times: 1:1, narrator: υιοῦ θεοῦ; 1:11, God: σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός; 3:11, unclean spirit: σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ; 5:7, Legion: υἱὲ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου; 9:7, God: οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός; 12:6 (x2), self-reference in Parable of the Tenants: ἔτι ἕνα εἶχεν υἱὸν ἀγαπητόν . . . ὅτι ἐντραπήσονται τὸν υἱόν μου; 13:32, self-reference: οὐδὲ ὁ υἱός, εἰ μὴ ὁ πατήρ; 14:61, high priest: ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ εὐλογητοῦ.

<sup>29</sup> C. H. Turner, “Ο Υἱὸς Μου Ο Αγαπητός,” *JTS* 27, no. 106 (1926), 116–17; also cited in Kazmierski, *Son*, 54.

### Summary of the Content of Jesus' Baptismal Revelatory Experience

The tearing of the heavens illustrates heavenly resources being deployed at the inauguration of Jesus' ministry. Jesus is to be seen as a figure recognized by heaven as having cosmic significance. This sign is followed by Mark's descending dove, which anoints Jesus as God's messiah and empowers him for ministry. The words of the divine voice indicate that Jesus has a particular relationship with God.<sup>30</sup> As the "beloved Son in whom God is well pleased," Jesus' sonship is placed above other common notions of sonship, which are inadequate to fully explain Jesus' relationship to the Father. All three of the above signs are initiated by heaven in Mark's Gospel and are revelations to Jesus about who he is and how he would fulfill his role in God's plan.<sup>31</sup> Now that the dominant emphasis of the content is established, the next section will analyze if Jesus responds appropriately to this content.

### *Jesus' Response*

The lack of any witnesses besides Jesus shows that the baptism phenomena are not given to engender reverence for Jesus in those who are not already followers. However, the voice does speak in the second person to Jesus, and Jesus' quiet awareness of the event implies his approval of the visionary and auditory signs as his public ministry is inaugurated.<sup>32</sup> When compared to the later revelatory events of the Gospel where others witness God's revelatory acts, Mark's choice to make Jesus the sole observer of this event is significant. Mark's use of three aorist indicatives in Mark 1:9 is a typical way of setting the stage for this account. Describing the

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<sup>30</sup> Hengel, *Son*, 63. See also J. Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1967), 11–65.

<sup>31</sup> Rindge, "Akedah," 767.

<sup>32</sup> France, *Mark*, 74, "In Mark . . . [the baptism] is narrated purely as an experience *of Jesus*, recorded by Mark for the benefit of his readers, but not accessible to any of the other actors on the scene, not even, apparently, to John."



timing of the event (Καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις), Jesus’ home town (ἦλθεν Ἰησοῦς ἀπὸ Ναζαρετ τῆς Γαλιλαίας), and his baptism by John (καὶ ἐβαπτίσθη εἰς τὸν Ἰορδάνην ὑπὸ Ἰωάννου), aorist verbs such as these express the historical backdrop of whatever event they are describing.<sup>33</sup> Aorist verbs are the most common verbal forms in narrative and relate events essential to the plot but not necessarily central to the primary action(s) of the subject in context. The timing of the event (“it came about in those days”), the origin of Jesus, and his baptism by John are details that provide the background for the main events of Mark 1:10–11.<sup>34</sup>

Mark 1:10 then breaks this pattern with a string of present participles, vividly describing the events of the revelatory vision. Mark signals this change of pace with his characteristic use of “immediately” (εὐθύς) at the beginning of the verse. The first participle used is ἀναβαίνων (“as he was coming up . . .”). He follows with an aorist indicative (“he saw,” εἶδεν) and two more present participles (“splitting,” σχιζομένου, and “descending,” καταβαῖνον). Cohen notes that present participles are “coincident” with the primary verb (εἶδεν), not antecedent or secondary.<sup>35</sup> In other words, the events described by the participles and the finite aorist are all taking place at the same time. As Jesus came up out of the water, his eyes were open and he was seeing the heavens part and the dove descend.

Mark is the only Gospel that explicitly states that Jesus saw both the torn heavens and the descending dove.<sup>36</sup> For Mark, Jesus’ visual and auditory perception of these heavenly signs and the voice to come are important for the following reasons.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> S. J. D. Cohen, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge: HUP, 1984), 107.

<sup>34</sup> S. E. Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek New Testament with Reference to Tense and Mood*, SBG 1 (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 92.

<sup>35</sup> Cohen, *Greek Grammar*, 419.

<sup>36</sup> In Matthew, it is only implied that Jesus sees the heavens tearing and Luke only implies that Jesus sees both the torn heavens and descending dove. See France, *Mark*, 74.

<sup>37</sup> Mark 1:11 follows this vision by simply recording that a voice “came from heaven” (φωνὴ ἐγένετο ἐκ τῶν

Jesus’ silent reception of the phenomena give his tacit approval to what these signs communicate about him as the next passage has Jesus willfully being led into the desert by the Spirit that just descended to him (Mark 1:12). The absence of an audience apart from Jesus indicates that Mark’s baptism account is for Jesus, not others, in Mark’s Gospel.

### *Subsequent Context*

Jesus’ passive recognition of what happens to him makes every future action of his more significant. Rather, Jesus himself witnesses the moment in which this heavenly connection is realized and therefore every action Jesus undertakes from this point onward in the Gospel is done with these events in the background. Although Mark’s Gospel is yet unclear on Jesus’ role in God’s redemptive program, the descent of the Spirit onto Jesus provides an impetus that Jesus does not have prior to this revelatory experience.<sup>38</sup> Just after the baptism, Mark 1:12 says, Καὶ εὐθὺς τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτὸν ἐκβάλλει εἰς τὴν ἔρημον. The Spirit’s timely *expulsion* (ἐκβάλλει) of Jesus into the desert with Satan sets the tone for the rest of the Gospel, which includes more exorcism accounts than any other Gospel.<sup>39</sup> Also, the Spirit’s casting of Jesus into the desert defines what is the purpose of the dove in the baptism account—to propel him into and equip

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<sup>38</sup> οὐρανῶν). Although Mark does not include an additional verb of hearing here, Jesus’ visual recognition of these events suggests such a verb is not needed; Jesus is already “tuned-in” to these revelatory phenomena. Some commentators suggest that Mark’s use of εἰς in Mark 1:10 connotes that the Spirit entered *into* Jesus at the baptism. See Collins, *Mark*, 149; E. P. Dixon, “Descending Spirit and Descending Gods: A ‘Greek’ Interpretation of the Spirit’s ‘Descent as a Dove’ in Mark 1:10,” *JBL* 128 (2009), 771; Gundry, *Mark*, 48; M. E. Boring, *Mark: A Commentary* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 43, 45. This idea has not gained a following, however, and many others have noted the pitfalls of drawing conclusions from the nuance of a preposition. In any case Funk *et al.*, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), §207.1, shows that εἰς can be the equivalent of ἐπὶ. See also Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium*, 1:91; J. D. Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark’s Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1983), 62–63

<sup>39</sup> Mark records five exorcism accounts in the 16 chapters of his Gospel (Mark 1.21–28, 3.22–30, 5.1–19, 9.14–30, and 9.38–41). As miracle stories in general account for 30% of Mark’s Gospel, and of those, nearly 40% are exorcisms. Exorcism stories occupy over 12% of the total material in Mark.

him for confrontation with Satan.<sup>40</sup> Reiterating an earlier point, Gnülka says, “Über die Art und Weise der Vereinigung ist nichts Näheres gesagt und sollte auch aus εἰς αὐτόν nicht herausgelesen werden. Das Sichtbarwerden des Geistes ist nicht in sich selbst wichtig, sondern im Blick auf Jesus, der der alleinige Geistträger ist.”<sup>41</sup> The descent of the Spirit to Jesus portrays him as “der alleinige Geistträger,” reinforced by John’s earlier description of him as the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8).

### *Conclusion to the Markan Baptism*

God’s revelatory act at the baptism addresses Jesus for his own sake and equips him with divine resources that Jesus will use in his forthcoming conflict with the “house of Satan” (Mark 3:27). God’s affirmation of Jesus encourages him in this task, as Jesus is tempted in the wilderness and then proclaims God’s kingdom (Mark 1:12–14). Mark 1:12–14 also illustrates Jesus’ response to his own baptism, after which he embarks on the trying journey into the wilderness before beginning his ministry of preaching. This response indicates the effect of the baptism on Jesus as one who is empowered by God’s Spirit and one for whom God has personally vouched. Thus, Jesus accepts his role and initiates his ministry to further establish God’s kingdom in his own life and work. Therefore, as far as Jesus himself is concerned, this revelatory act of God fulfills its purpose by producing a positive response in Jesus.

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<sup>40</sup> Hahn, *Titles*, 338.

<sup>41</sup> J. Gnülka, *Das Evangelium nach Marcus* (Zurich: Benziger Verlag, 1979), 52–53.

## The Transfiguration (Mark 9:2–8)

The transfiguration includes Peter, James, and John as witnesses and yet the phenomena leave these men ignorant and still lacking in their reverence for Jesus and what he has come to do. This unwitting response is ironic in light of the graphic nature of the event.<sup>42</sup> Mark 9:2–8 contains some of the same content as Mark’s baptism: namely, the voice from heaven and the “beloved son” acclamation. The differences, however, will shed light on the way this pericope feeds into the function of revelatory acts of God in Mark. The revelatory content of the transfiguration differs from that of the baptism in four ways: First, the setting of the transfiguration is a “high mountain” (Mark 9:2). Second, Jesus’ appearance changes (Mark 9:2–3). Third, Jesus appears with Elijah and Moses (Mark 9:4). Fourth, a cloud envelops them as a voice begins speaking (Mark 9:7).<sup>43</sup> The paragraphs below will analyze (1) the content of the revelatory act of God, (2) the response of the disciples, and (3) the context subsequent to the event to analyze the role of the Markan transfiguration for engendering reverence for Jesus.

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<sup>42</sup> G. H. Boobyer, “St Mark and the Transfiguration,” *JTS* 41 (1940), 119–40, 122–23, calls Christianity a “religion of revelation” and argues that the transfiguration would have been understood by early Christians as indicative of Jesus’ pre-existence.

<sup>43</sup> J. P. Heil, *The Transfiguration of Jesus: Narrative Meaning and Function of Mark 9:2–8, Matt. 17:1–8 and Luke 9:28–36*, AnaBib 144 (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2000), 38–39, distinguishes between theophanies, visions, and epiphanies, as “modern, technical designations for very specific and different literary genres in the biblical tradition.” Heil, *Transfiguration*, 36–39. He classifies the transfiguration as an epiphany, “a sudden and unexpected manifestation of a divine or heavenly being experienced by certain selected persons as an event independent of their seeing, in which the divine being reveals a divine attribute, action, or message . . . in an epiphany the divine being assumes visible form and appears before the eyes of human beings.” Heil rules out theophany as the best category for the transfiguration because theophanies are typically accompanied by a frightening display of power in nature. Though the three disciples in the transfiguration are afraid and there are signs in nature (e.g., the cloud), the two motifs are not joined in this account. Heil also rules out vision as the most appropriate category, because purely visionary experiences most often portray heavenly realities as they remain in heaven (i.e., not having come to Earth).

### *Content of the Markan Transfiguration*

#### **1. On a “High Mountain” (Mark 9:2)**

The use of mountains to denote revelatory significance is well-established in scholarly work.<sup>44</sup>

Mountains in Mark are places that Jesus would withdraw to pray (Mark 6:46), call his disciples (Mark 3:13), or reveal personal information about himself and his mission (Mark 9:7). This

Markan setting on a “high mountain” mirrors the exceptional nature of the revelatory event itself.<sup>45</sup> Donahue and Harrington write, “More important than the precise geographical location is the motif that mountains (Moriah, Sinai, Jerusalem, etc. as well as Olympus and many other non-Jewish sites) are places of communication with divine beings and of divine revelation.”<sup>46</sup>

“That Jesus now leads Peter, James, and John up to a ‘high mountain’ (Mark 9:2) thus prepares the audience for some sort of privileged revelatory or heavenly encounter.”<sup>47</sup> Malbon’s research, which analyzes topography in Mark, constructs a “Topographical Hierarchy” in which she concludes that a “mountain forms a natural location for divine/human encounters.”<sup>48</sup>

Accordingly, the topography of the transfiguration event sets the stage for “special revelation.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> S. J. Gathercole, *The Preexistent Son* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 48; S. S. Lee, *Jesus’ Transfiguration and the Believers’ Transformation*, WUNT 2.265 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 12; Heil, *Transfiguration*, 151–54. B. E. Reid, *The Transfiguration: A Source- and Redaction-Critical Study of Luke 9:28–36*, CRB 32 (Paris: Gabalda, 1993), 25, believe the mountain, among other things, to be a reference to the parousia.

<sup>45</sup> C. A. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20*, vol. 34B, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 35.

<sup>46</sup> J. R. Donahue and D. J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 268. Heil, *Transfiguration*, 154.

<sup>47</sup> Malbon, *Narrative Space*, 84.

<sup>48</sup> F. W. Danker, *Jesus and the New Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 198.

## 2. Jesus' Distinguished Appearance (Mark 9:2–3)

With the sudden change of Jesus' appearance, Jesus' appearance stands in contrast with Elijah and Moses.<sup>50</sup> Jesus' is “metamorphosized” and his appearance shines “exceedingly white, whiter than any launderer on Earth would be able to whiten them” (Mark 9:3, καὶ μετεμορφώθη ἔμπροσθεν αὐτῶν, καὶ τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο στίλβοντα λευκὰ λίαν, οἷα γναφεὺς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς οὐ δύναται οὕτως λευκᾶναι).<sup>51</sup> Heil says “that he resembles a heavenly being but remains on the earth . . . it facilitates the sudden and unexpected appearance of Moses and Elijah as heavenly figures.”<sup>52</sup> Although a helpful starting place, the specifics of Jesus' appearance are difficult to interpret. In what sense is he heavenly? Some details in Mark's transfiguration story are almost identical to descriptions of other heavenly or angelic figures in visionary narratives.<sup>53</sup>

First, Mark's description of Jesus' clothes is similar to other Greco-Roman celestial figures.<sup>54</sup> Mark 9:3 says that Jesus' garments “came to shine exceedingly white” (ἐγένετο στίλβοντα λευκὰ λίαν).<sup>55</sup> The presence of the qualifiers “shine” and “exceedingly” make Jesus' appearance a point of emphasis for Mark. Chilton notes that white garments have “a firm place

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<sup>50</sup> Lee, *Transfiguration*, 21.

<sup>51</sup> G. Theissen, *Erleben und Verhalten der ersten Christen: eine Psychologie des Urchristentums* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007), 160, sees the transfiguration as an Easter appearance read back into the earthly life of Jesus.

<sup>52</sup> Heil, *Transfiguration*, 43; Lee, *Transfiguration*, 12.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Mark 16:5, Matt. 17:2; 28:3; Luke 9:29; Acts 1:10; John 20:12; Rev 3:5, 18; 4:4, cited in B. Chilton, “The Transfiguration: Dominical Assurance and Apostolic Vision,” *NTS* 27 (1980): 117.

<sup>54</sup> R. Bauckham, “The Throne of God and the Worship of Jesus,” in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism*, 49–69 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 51, discusses the physical appearance of heavenly figures and says, “I do not consider the visible appearance a criterion of divine identity.” Bauckham does not believe these accounts “employ elements of description which are specific or unique to God, but borrow a standard set of descriptives that could be used to describe any heavenly being.” He cites L. W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 85–92, as a counter example. Hurtado demonstrates that the categories that Bauckham delineates may not so clearly delimited in the literature and also readily acknowledges that, “It also apparently seemed fitting that, in view of this [principle agent's] close relationship to God, he should be portrayed as somewhat visually similar to his master” (89). Gathercole, *Preexistent*, 48–49, makes further comments on these matters relative to the transfiguration account.

<sup>55</sup> This is the only place in the NT that “shine” (στίλβοντα) is used.

in New Testament visionary narratives.”<sup>56</sup> And the following phrase is equally emphatic, which says that his garments were whiter than anyone on earth could make them (Mark 9:3). Here we have the plain statement that God is responsible for what the disciples were seeing, not a human. Burkill agrees, and yet goes on to conclude that “its being ‘very white’ suggests that the transfiguration is to be understood as a glorification; for in the New Testament, whenever the adjective ‘white’ is used of clothing, it always refers to the garments of angels (cf. Matt. 28:3; Mark 16:5; John 20:12; Acts 1:10) or to those of the saints who have been glorified in heaven (cf. Rev 3:4, 5, 18; 4:4; 6:11; 7:9, 13).”<sup>57</sup> Thus, Jesus’ appearance at the transfiguration is indistinguishable from other heavenly figures with white garments and is a gesture of glorification in this revelatory act of God.<sup>58</sup>

Second, Mark’s metamorphosis of Jesus is comparable to apotheosis-stories of “divine men” in Hellenistic literature.<sup>59</sup> The text says that Jesus was transfigured before them (μετεμορφώθη) and then describes the change in his clothing. Ziesler points out that Jesus is the subject of the verb “transfigured,” not his clothes. The phrase “and his clothes” was included to mean that “the transfiguration is not merely of His face, as in the case of Moses, but extends even to His clothes.”<sup>60</sup> France expounds, “Mark’s καί . . . is . . . more naturally interpreted as adding new information than as explaining the nature of the previously mentioned change of

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<sup>56</sup> Chilton, “Transfiguration,” 117, cites Mark 16:5, Matt. 17:2; 28:3; Luke 9:29; Acts 1:10; John 20:12; Rev 3:5, 18; 4:4.

<sup>57</sup> T. A. Burkill, *Mysterious Revelation: An Examination of the Philosophy of St. Mark’s Gospel* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963), 162.

<sup>58</sup> Gathercole, *Preexistent*, 49–50.

<sup>59</sup> Collins, *Mark*, 415. L. Kreitzer, “Apotheosis of the Roman Emperor,” *BA* 53 (1990): 211–17. Discussed further in note 64.

<sup>60</sup> J. A. Ziesler, “The Transfiguration Story and the Markan Soteriology,” *ExpT* 81 (1970), 265–66.

appearance.”<sup>61</sup> However, the transformation of Jesus’ whole person still does not separate him from other “divine men” at the time.<sup>62</sup> Apotheosis accounts in which figures became godlike were not uncommon in contemporary Greco-Roman literature, and so it may seem that a comparison between the transfiguration and these accounts is profitable for interpreting Mark.

Nevertheless, there is also counter-evidence that seems to distinguish Jesus from synchronous heavenly figures. First and most convincingly, Jesus’ differentiation from other heavenly figures appears in the Markan context, as Jesus is contrasted with Elijah and Moses.<sup>63</sup> Neither Elijah nor Moses is spoken of as looking anything like Jesus. “God’s rule has come with power in [Jesus], not in Moses and Elijah, to whom Mark has attributed no transfiguration.”<sup>64</sup> In fact, the account only describes what Elijah and Moses were doing (ἦσαν συλλαλοῦντες τῷ Ἰησοῦ), saying nothing about how they appeared. Therefore, Mark’s Jesus is distinguished from the other heavenly figures. This observation does not render useless comparisons between Jesus and other heavenly figures. Indeed, the angelic “young man” of Mark 16 could be taken into account in this way. However, Mark portrays a disparity between Jesus and such figures as much as any the similarity.

Scholars of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century asserted the concept of a “divine man” from Greco-Roman apotheosis accounts in which a transfigured hero becomes a god and is caught up to heaven.<sup>65</sup> In these accounts, figures never return to their human, non-deified, states. Jesus’

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<sup>61</sup> France, *Mark*, 351 n. 12.

<sup>62</sup> Edwards, *Mark*, 269.

<sup>63</sup> Lee, *Transfiguration*, 16–20.

<sup>64</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 461.

<sup>65</sup> For example, see the description of Caligula in Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, trans. R. Graves (New York: Penguin, 1957), 88. Kee, *Miracle*, 297–99, briefly outlines the history of “divine man” research and contends that the *Gesamtkonzeption* of a divine man is untenable (the term used in H.-D. Betz, *Lukian von Samosata und das Neue Testament*, RPP [Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1961], 100–101). He discusses the fissures that



“re-metamorphosis” sets him apart from these figures. This return to his former, non-transfigured state changes the transfiguration account altogether. Instead of this event being a transformation into something new, the transfiguration seems to be a brief flash of who he already is.<sup>66</sup>

Third, this heavenly glorification is taking place in a human being prior to his death or ascent to heaven. Other NT examples that contain figures arrayed in white refer exclusively to heavenly or angelic figures.<sup>67</sup> Jesus’ transfigured appearance while still on earth ascribes to him a *present* heavenly state. Furthermore, his appearance is changed prior to the appearance of the cloud and the voice’s declaration (Mark 9:2–3, 7), showing that his transfiguration was not an effect of these two phenomena.<sup>68</sup>

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began to emerge in the work of L. Bieler, *ΘΕΙΟΣ ΑΝΗΡ: Das Bild des göttlichen Menschen in Spätantike und Frühchristentum*, 2 vols., 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967), who “is unable to come up with an archetype and can only draw attention to the breadth of the variation in form and function of what he represents as the typical “divine man” (298), and also mentions the work of D. L. Tiede, *The Charismatic Figure as Miracle Worker* (Missoula, MT: SBL, 1972), followed by C. R. Holladay, *Theios Aner in Hellenistic-Judaism: A Critique of the Use of this Category in New Testament Christology* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977). However, the critiques listed above may be too reactionary, as recent research continues to find divine man ideas helpful in explaining ancient relationships between heroes and divines. See C. Moss, “The Transfiguration: An Exercise in Markan Accommodation,” *BI* 12 (2004): 69–89; J. L. Kreizer, “Apotheosis of the Roman Emperor,” *BA* 53 (1990): 211–17, E. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 205–209, resurrects the thesis of L. R. Taylor, *The Divinity of the Roman Emperor* (Middletown, CT: American Philological Association, 1931), that the Greco-Roman divine man motif is derived from the Ptolemaic kings in Egypt (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. printed in Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1975; 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York: Scholars Press, 2000).

<sup>66</sup> Gathercole, *Preexistent*, 47–50.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Mark 16:5, Matt. 28:3; Acts 1:10; John 20:12; Rev 3:5, 18; 4:4. See also Exod. 34:29.

<sup>68</sup> One of the earliest Christian traditions about how Jesus’ form related to his being comes from Phil 2:6–7 and may have represented a tradition about Jesus that was in circulation at the time of Mark’s writing. W. C. Placher, *Mark, Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 124. Twice in this passage, Paul emphasizes the changed form of Jesus (μορφή). The wording in the two passages is not close enough to say that Mark was literarily dependent on Philippians. For instance, the verbs in Philippians 2 are primarily in the active voice, whereas Mark 9:2’s discussion of Jesus changed state is in the passive voice, with the action being performed on Jesus. Also, Mark 9 does not say Jesus was “in the form of . . .,” but simply states “he was transfigured . . .” (μετεμορφώθη). Rather than any literary dependence, these texts evidence that the two authors may have been drawing upon a similar tradition, well-known in the earliest Christian communities. If this were the *Sitz im Leben* in which the transfiguration account originated, then any parallel with Hellenistic divine men would be even less relevant. Jesus transfigured before the disciples may illustrate Mark’s view of Jesus’ identity, possessing both the divine and human. As Placher remarks, the revelation implicit in Mark 9 may have been that “three disciples see something of the form of God of which Jesus had emptied himself” (Placher, *Mark*, 124).

Therefore, since the physical description of the transfigured Jesus is distinguishable from other Greco-Roman or Jewish parallels,<sup>69</sup> perhaps the best access interpreters have to the significance of this event come from the context of the Gospel itself. And given the contrast made by Mark between the appearance of Jesus and Elijah and Moses, one can conclude that Jesus' divine identity is primarily in view. Edwards says, "the uniqueness of the transfiguration of Jesus deprives it of any adequate external standard or frame of reference by which to judge it . . . the transfiguration is a momentary empirical revelation of . . . Jesus."<sup>70</sup>

### 3. Jesus Supersedes Elijah and Moses (Mark 9:4)

The appearance of Elijah and Moses at the transfiguration establishes Jesus as the One who will now meet with God on behalf of God's people and elevates the importance of Jesus' life for Israel's redemption. Some commentators believe that the OT connection with these prophets is founded upon the fact that both Moses and Elijah are figures who met with God on the tops of mountains (Exodus 19–24, 34 and 1 Kings 19).<sup>71</sup> As Marcus writes, "the key to the symbolism of the appearance of 'Elijah with Moses' on the mountain probably lies in their common association with Mt. Sinai = Horeb, where they both encountered God."<sup>72</sup> Other scholars add

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<sup>69</sup> See discussion in notes 64, 66 above. Hengel, *Son*, 31, says, "The title son of God should not be over-hastily associated with the type of the so-called θεῖος ἀνὴρ, the divine man, especially as it is questionable how far one can speak at all of this as an established type in the first century AD." B. Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 263, also comments, "This tale . . . has nothing to do with the Hellenistic concept of metamorphosis, for Jesus is not transformed into something he was not before. He is simply revealed in the glory that is proper to him."

<sup>70</sup> Edwards, *Mark*, 271.

<sup>71</sup> J. Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, AB (London: Yale University Press, 2009), 632; Hooker, *Mark*, 214–15; Collins, *Mark*, 416–17.

<sup>72</sup> Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 632. Elijah mentioned first is only found in Mark and has confused scholars for years. The best and simplest explanation posed is in France, *Mark*, 351, who says, "The unhistorical order . . . is probably best accounted for by the fact that the dialogue with the disciples which follows in vv. 11–13 will focus on Elijah rather than Moses."

that the presence of these prophets at the transfiguration is a “handing of the baton” to Jesus, who would now be the one who served as the prophetic mouthpiece of God to his people.<sup>73</sup> Thus, Elijah and Moses in this vision bring together what is now embodied in Jesus:

This story has united two expectations which were alive in Judaism: the coming of the prophet of the end-time who is like Moses and the appearing of Elijah at the dawning of the end-time. It has declared to every Jew that the fulfillment of the history of Israel and of every hope for the glorious end-time have already begun with the coming of Jesus.”<sup>74</sup>

Evans sums up the significance of Elijah and Moses in this scene when saying, “most importantly, both Moses and Elijah had visions of God. Perhaps it is on this basis that they qualify as witnesses to the glorious appearance of Jesus, God’s son.”<sup>75</sup> Mark mentions Moses and Elijah with Jesus because of the credentials of these men as prophets who met with God in their lifetimes and are doing the same in this narrative.

#### **4. The Enveloping Cloud and Divine Voice (Mark 9:7)**

The cloud can be seen as a “theophanic element, signifying the presence of God,” allusive to the cloud on Mount Sinai in Exod. 24:15–16 and in answer to Peter’s suggestion.<sup>76</sup> “God requires no human partners to see to the well-being of his holy ones but himself sends his overshadowing,

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<sup>73</sup> Whether or not the transfiguration of Jesus contains a Moses typology has been a subject of some debate. Gundry cites several factors in argument against such a hypothesis: Jesus’ face does not shine like Moses’ but rather only his garments; the timing of the events is slightly different; Moses took four companions plus the seventy elders, whereas Jesus takes only three disciples; God talks to Moses versus Jesus talking to departed humans Moses and Elijah; and Elijah has no place in the Sinai narrative; Gundry, *Mark*, 475–76. However, an overwhelming majority of scholars do not find these reasons compelling enough to dismiss the allusion.

<sup>74</sup> E. Schweizer, *Jesus, the Parable of God*, PTMS 37 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1974), 183, quoted in France, *Mark*, 352–53.

<sup>75</sup> Evans, *Mark*, 36.

<sup>76</sup> Lohmeyer, *Markus*, 196–98; Taylor, *Mark*, 391; Collins, *Mark*, 425; Guelich, *Mark 1-8*:26, 37; Gundry, *Mark*, 480; Stein, *Mark*, 418 n.12, cites the following references: Exod. 16:10; 19:9; 24:15–18; 33:7–11; 40:34–38; Num. 9:15–22; 1 Kings 8:10–13; Isa. 4:5. And for a voice coming out of a cloud: Exod. 19:19; 24:16; 34:5; Num. 11:25; 12:5–6; Deut. 31:15–16. Also Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 639.

protective cloud.”<sup>77</sup> Collins notes the likeness of the theophanic language present here with that in Exod. 40:32–35. Peter’s suggestion to build tents, the cloud surrounding those on the mountain, and the presence of Elijah and Moses all contribute to the cloud invoking theophanic imagery. “The important thing is that the disciples saw the cloud and recognized the divine presence.”<sup>78</sup>

The divine voice then declares the significance of Jesus’ sonship to the disciples witnessing the event. God’s declaration about Jesus’ divine sonship is now spread to a wider audience, Peter, James, and John. So, the voice’s declaration about Jesus, seen with Elijah and Moses, distinguishes him from these prophets as the unique Son of God. The visual contrast between Jesus and Elijah/Moses has already been discussed; Jesus visually stands apart from these two figures. The voice’s affirmation of Jesus’ sonship with no mention of Elijah’s or Moses’ sonship indicates that Jesus is set apart from these figures in his filial relationship with God as well. Moreover, the articular form of the title ascribed to Jesus signals a particular exclusivity.<sup>79</sup> This observation falls right in line with Turner, who said that “beloved” could connote singularity or uniqueness.<sup>80</sup> Mark’s voice bestows upon Jesus unequalled status as the only “beloved Son” in the Gospel.<sup>81</sup>

The voice adds the command, “Listen to him” (Mark 9:7, ἀκούετε αὐτοῦ) as a description of Jesus’ divine authority. “Listen to him” is widely viewed as an allusion to Deut. 18:15–18, where a prophet like Moses is promised. Although this allusion is fairly clear, the context in Mark 9 also points to an additional reference in this command. Given Jesus’ repeated pleas to

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<sup>77</sup> Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 639.

<sup>78</sup> Collins, *Mark*, 425.

<sup>79</sup> Mark 9:7, “This is *my beloved son*” (ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός).

<sup>80</sup> Turner, “Αγαπητός,” 123.

<sup>81</sup> Hurtado, *Mark*, 145–46.

listen to his teaching, a rebuke of the disciples for not accepting what he has clearly said about his passion may also be intended (cf. Mark 4:2–3, 9, 23–24; 7:14; 8:18).<sup>82</sup> “After the disciples had repeatedly failed to understand Jesus [and] their spokesman Peter has just defied Jesus on his teaching that the mission of the Son of Man involves his suffering and death,” the voice tells Peter and the others to heed the earlier words of Jesus, that he must suffer and die to fulfill his mission (Mark 8:31).<sup>83</sup> Heil calls this the “pivotal mandate” of this scene, in which “whole orientation and final focus centers upon a specific mandate, a *climactic command*.”<sup>84</sup>

Lastly, Bockmuehl observes that the pattern in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament offers the explicit interpretation to visions and revelations.<sup>85</sup> That is, he sees consistency in biblical and Second Temple revelatory activity, where visions, dreams, and other similar phenomena are accompanied by corresponding explanations, assisting the subject in understanding the revelatory experience. Therefore, the voice is introduced at the end of the visionary experience to interpret for the disciples what is the meaning of the visionary phenomena. That is, Jesus’ transfigured appearance, the presence of Elijah and Moses, and the enveloping cloud all build the case for Jesus’ revelatory authority, ascribed to him by God at the end of the event.<sup>86</sup> Jesus’ teaching must be listened to because it carries divine weight. And thus, Jesus is further distinguished from the other two figures with him as the one, set above both Elijah and Moses, who has the particular authority to speak on behalf of God.<sup>87</sup> As Hooker

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<sup>82</sup> Edwards, *Mark*, 268; Stein, *Mark*, 419; Heil, *Transfiguration*, 166.

<sup>83</sup> B. M. F. van Iersel, *Mark: A Reader-Response Commentary*, JSNTS 164 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 297. Lohmeyer, *Markus*, 186, notes, “Diese Frage wird nicht durch ein Wort Jesu oder des Moses und Elias beantwortet, sonder gleichsam überholt durch das nächste Ereignis, das Erscheinen der Wolke und das Zeugnis der Wolkenstimme.”

<sup>84</sup> Heil, *Transfiguration*, 51, emphasis original. See also Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 1114.

<sup>85</sup> Bockmuehl, *Revelation*, 30.

<sup>86</sup> Donahue, *Mark*, 271, says, “listen to him” entitles Jesus to revelatory privileges that belong only to God.

<sup>87</sup> Evans, *Mark*, 38; Heil, *Transfiguration*, 165.

writes, “It is the authority of one who is uniquely son of God, and the words remind us also of the repeated commands in the Old Testament to listen to—and to obey—God himself.”<sup>88</sup>

### **Summary of the Content of the Transfiguration**

The transfiguration event is in a setting that prepares the disciples to treat it as a significant event (i.e., on a high mountain). The appearance of two Jewish luminaries, Elijah with Moses, further implies that God’s presence will be sensed on the mountaintop. The metamorphosis of Jesus and the appearance of the cloud confirm the trajectory of the revelatory experience—Jesus is exalted and God makes an appearance in the cloud. Thus, the content of this revelatory act of God is “loud and clear” for the disciples to respond with reverence for Jesus.

### *Response of the Disciples*

Unfortunately, Peter’s response at the transfiguration “savours of anticlimax.”<sup>89</sup> Peter’s reply is one of ignorance, and therefore none of the visionary or auditory phenomena described above cause him to reverence Jesus. Several other observations are relevant: First, Mark broadens the revelatory audience by including the disciples, making the message of Jesus’ sonship more widely known to characters in the Gospel. The baptism account mentions Jesus as the only recipient, and so this shift of recipients is notable. Mark 9:2 says, “and he was transfigured

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<sup>88</sup> Hooker, *Mark*, 218.

<sup>89</sup> F. S. Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1992), 6, refers to Ron Buchanan as a man whose football career in his early 20’s was so great that everything he did afterward seemed a let down—an apt parallel to the relationship between Peter’s confession in Mark 8:29 and his response to the transfiguration! C. Focant, “Une christologie de type ‘mystique’ (Marc 1.1–16.8),” *NTS* 55 (2009): 1–21, 13–17, argues that Mark’s plot develops in the wake of such responses to Jesus.

*before them*” (καὶ μετεμορφώθη ἔμπροσθεν αὐτῶν).<sup>90</sup> The audience is reiterated in Mark 9:4, which states that “Elijah with Moses *were seen by them*” (καὶ ὤφθη αὐτοῖς Ἡλίας σὺν Μωϋσεῖ), and the voice in Mark 9:7 addresses all three of the disciples (“you,” plural).<sup>91</sup> Chilton believes the above shows “that Mark is particular about the audience of the phenomena being described.”<sup>92</sup> Mark is explicit that the three disciples witness this encounter, only the second revelatory experience in Mark’s Gospel and one in which Jesus’ connection with the divine is now being made more explicit in the Gospel.<sup>93</sup>

Second, although the disciples’ fear (Mark 9:5–6, ἔκφοβοι) in itself is not an inappropriate response to what they witness, Mark still makes clear that it is generally a response of ignorance rather than understanding (Mark 9:6).<sup>94</sup> However, Hurtado and Catchpole may underemphasize the fact that Peter’s fear is coupled with an ignorant response to the vision. Moreover, the wider

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<sup>90</sup> Italics added.

<sup>91</sup> Stein, *Mark*, 416, italics added.

<sup>92</sup> Chilton, “Transfiguration,” 117.

<sup>93</sup> Along with the broadening of the audience, the text still emphasizes the exclusivity of the event by saying they were “by themselves” (9:2, κατ’ ἰδίαν μόνους). These disciples are the same ones Jesus brought with him when he raised Jairus’ daughter in Mark 5:37, a miracle that was also performed for an exclusive audience. Stein observes the emphasis Mark is placing on the privacy of the revelatory experience in that the Greek text forms a grammatical redundancy, literally translated “privately, alone” (9:2, κατ’ ἰδίαν μόνους; Stein, *Mark*, 416). Other textual and contextual clues hint that Mark was deliberately building up this event as one in which a special revelation will occur. In support of this, Collins believes that limiting the audience in 9:2–8 is “a literary device to heighten the awesome ... character of the transformation” (Collins, *Mark*, 421). In fact, Mark often demonstrates a preference for pulling people aside in moments of revelation/explanation (E.g., Mark 4:34; 7:33; 9:28; 13:3.). In the previous pericope, Peter “took aside” (8:32, πρόσλαβόμενος) Jesus to rebuke him, an action for which Peter is castigated in 8:33. Then in this passage, Jesus “takes along” (9:2, παραλαμβάνει) the three disciples to witness his transfiguration. Combined with the fact that Jesus led the disciples up on the mountain, the exclusive audience Jesus gives to his disciples signifies the privilege of these three witnesses (Hooker, *Mark*, 216. “They went by themselves: as usual, we find that this disclosure of truth takes place in private.”).

<sup>94</sup> L. W. Hurtado, “The Women, the Tomb, and the Climax of Mark,” in *A Wandering Galilean: Essays in Honour of Sean Freyne*, (ed.) Z. Rodgers *et al.* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), follows D. Catchpole, “The Fearful Silence of the Women At the Tomb: A Study in Markan Theology,” *JTSA* 18 (1977), 8, who cites a number of instances in which “fear and trembling constitute the required response to divine manifestation.” Chilton, “Transfiguration,” 118–19, also notes that, in the New Testament, the noun ἔκφοβος is only found here and in Heb 12:21 where it references Moses’ reaction to “the sight” on Mount Sinai. However, both comments do not adequately take stock of the ignorance that marks Peter’s response.

context of the transfiguration (discussed below) indicates that the disciples do not heed the voice of the cloud that tells them to “Listen to him.”

Third, regarding Peter’s suggestion that he build tents, Riesenfeld sees this as a reference to the Feast of Booths from Lev. 23:39–43.<sup>95</sup> During this feast, Israel was to gather to celebrate the produce of the land, living in booths as a reminder of both the salvation of God in delivering Israel from Egypt and his presence with them in the desert in the “cloud of Shekhinah”.<sup>96</sup> However, Riesenfeld’s work has been largely critiqued and a majority of scholars<sup>97</sup> now believe Peter’s suggestion is an eschatological reference to the resurrection or Parousia.<sup>98</sup> Whatever the reference, Mark specifically states that Peter’s response to the vision is one of ignorance (Mark 9:6, οὐ γὰρ ἤδει τί ἀποκριθῆναι). Despite Peter’s declaration about Jesus in Mark 8:29 and the exclusive privilege of witnessing this vision during which the voice commands them to “listen” to Jesus, the transfiguration adds nothing to his understanding of Jesus and what he has come to accomplish. Kazmierski and Stein have both noted that the emphasis of the revelatory experience is on Jesus, not Peter’s foolish response.<sup>99</sup> But this emphasis on Jesus makes Peter’s response even more striking. Neither Jesus’ physical appearance nor the cloud’s unambiguous command

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<sup>95</sup> H. Riesenfeld, *Jésus Transfiguré* (København: E. Munksgaard, 1947), 265–80. This view sees Peter’s suggestion that tents be built as a response to the future eschatological fullness that this experience on the mountain anticipates. That is, as the Feast of Tabernacles “looked forward to the New Age when Jahweh would again tabernacle with His people,” so Peter’s proposal here suggests that this New Age of the coming eschaton will soon come.

<sup>96</sup> Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 1115–116. Marcus adds that Peter’s response may also recall “Jewish and NT traditions according to which the righteous dead reside in tents, booths, or canopies” citing Luke 16:9; *b. B. Bat. 75a*; *Lev. Rab. 25:2*; 2 Cor. 5:1–5.

<sup>97</sup> Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 1115–17; Hooker, *Mark*, 217; Collins, *Mark*, 424; Evans, *Mark*, 37, Donahue, *Mark*, 270; France, *Mark*, 354; Heil, *Transfiguration*, 161

<sup>98</sup> The first and most notable example is Boobyer, “Transfiguration,” 119–40. Boobyer parallels this passage with 2 Cor. 5:1, where God builds a tent for his people.

<sup>99</sup> Kazmierski, *Jesus, the Son of God*, 118–26. Stein, *Mark*, 418; Donahue, *Mark*, 270. M. Öhler, “Die Verklärung (Mark 9:1–8): Die Ankunft der Herrschaft Gottes Auf der Erde,” *NovT* 38 (1996), 198, adds, “Es ist zwar in vv. 2–8 von der βασιλεία nicht mehr die Rede, tatsächlich geschieht aber Vergleichbares, da ja die Jünger die Herrlichkeit des Himmels sehen.”



produces reverence for Jesus in the witnesses to the event.

### *Subsequent Context*

The aftermath of the transfiguration portrays the disciples negatively as well. Mark 9:32 states that the disciples still do not understand Jesus' Passion predictions, despite both his earlier rebuke of Peter, Jesus' changed appearance with Elijah and Moses on the mount of transfiguration, and the divine voice's command to "listen to" Jesus. In short, the transfiguration does not seem to produce any change in the disciples' response to Jesus after the event had come and gone.<sup>100</sup>

### *Conclusion to the Transfiguration*

To be sure, the disciples' experience of Jesus at the transfiguration develops themes introduced at Jesus' baptism. The exclusivity of the divine revelation, Jesus' distinction in relation to God, and the validation of Jesus by God are all reiterated in Mark 9's revelatory act of God. However, the disciples seem unchanged by this experience. The three disciples at the transfiguration bear the marks of having witnessed a theophany on the mount (e.g., fear). But their anxiety at the event is attributed to ignorance not reverence (Mark 9:6). Jesus, formerly the passive observer of God's revelatory activity, now takes part in the phenomena that makes him the central figure in God's plan to redeem his people.

Therefore, although Jesus' transfiguration broadens the revelatory purview of Mark's Gospel by including the three disciples, the disciples seem unchanged by the visions and voices

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<sup>100</sup> R. C. Tannehill, "The Disciples in Mark: The Function of a Narrative Role," *JR* 57 (1977): 386–405, 401, repeatedly refers to the disciples "failure" and them being "put in a bad light" in Mark's Gospel.

they witness at the transfiguration. The only effect these phenomena have on the disciples is to produce fear and confusion. No knowledge or understanding of Jesus and his mission is contributed to the disciples through the transfiguration episode.

## The Crucifixion Phenomena (Mark 15:33–39)

Mark's account of Jesus' crucifixion offers two parallel reactions by the crowds and the centurion that will be discussed in what follows.<sup>101</sup> Mark 15:33 states that darkness covered the whole land for three hours and records the mockery of the crowd. Five verses later, the curtain of the temple is torn in two, from top to bottom, and the centurion's declaration is recorded.<sup>102</sup> The structure of Mark 15:33–39 places the response of the crowd and that of the centurion in parallel. These seven verses recount two miraculous events: the three hours of darkness followed by the tearing of the temple veil, establishing the two events as parallel scenes:<sup>103</sup>

### **Figure 2: Mark 15:33–39**

15:33	revelatory phenomenon: three hours of darkness
15:34	cry of Jesus
15:35–36	unfavorable reaction by Jewish onlookers

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<sup>101</sup> Although commentators may subdivide this Markan section into two smaller sections (15:33–37 and 15:38–39), many believe that 15:33–39/41 forms a discrete unit. See G. Rossé, *The Cry of Jesus on the Cross* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 13–27; Edwards, *Mark*, 474; Gundry, *Mark*, 947 for some who end the unit at 15:39. Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 1053; Donahue, *Mark*, 446; Hooker, *Mark*, 374; D. R. A. Hare, *Mark* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 215; W. L. Lane, *Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 570; H. Bayer, *Das Evangelium Des Markus*, HTA (Giessen: Brunnen Verlag, 2008), 571, all see 15:41 as end of the section.

<sup>102</sup> Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 1117.

<sup>103</sup> Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 1061, implies this structure when he says, “the Markan account of Jesus’ last hour alternates between descriptions of cosmic and earthly wonders (15:33, 38), the death-cry and decease of Jesus (15:34, 37), and the reactions of bystanders to his death and dying (15:35–36, 39–41).”

15:37	cry of Jesus
15:38	revelatory phenomenon: tearing of the veil
15:39	favorable reaction by Roman centurion

The above structure fits well into the theme of Mark's Gospel, in which the miraculous works of Jesus lead to opposition from the Jewish leadership and the Gentile audience experiences and responds to Jesus. The paragraphs below will analyze (1) the content of these phenomena, (2) the responses of witnesses, and (3) the subsequent context of these events to determine the relationship between the crucifixion phenomena and the responses of characters to Jesus.

### *Content of the Crucifixion Phenomena*

#### **1. The Darkness at the Crowd's Response (Mark 15:33–36)**

The three hours of darkness in Mark 15:33 is a divine omen of judgment for the Jewish leadership for rejecting Jesus. This cosmic sign is only Markan background material and goes unnoticed by the crowd, as the cry of Jesus and especially the crowd's reactions to Jesus' cry are the focus of the verses.

Citing several sources, Taylor says that darkness was commonly believed to accompany the death of great men in the ancient world.<sup>104</sup> That is, the three hours of darkness in Mark 15 is a foreboding omen as Jesus dies. Evans goes further when asserting that the darkness is best understood as an indicator of heavenly displeasure at the death of Jesus. He writes, "evidently, the execution of Jesus has not gone unnoticed by the heavens, which recoil from viewing the spectacle."<sup>105</sup> Brown concurs as he observes that (1) "if day and night no longer follow the normal sequence, that would be a sign that God is breaking the covenant" and (2) the final

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<sup>104</sup> Cf. J. Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 1205; Taylor, *Mark*, 592.  
<sup>105</sup> Evans, *Mark*, 512.

exodus plague “was darkness ‘over all the land’ for three days, called down by Moses as a punishment for the Egyptians. . . . The (first) Passover context of that plague makes it a likely parallel for the darkness at the Passover of Jesus’ death.”<sup>106</sup>

Whatever the specific nuance, divine wrath is the fundamental consensus view for the phenomenon.<sup>107</sup> However, Mark does not seem interested in the people’s awareness of God’s wrath signified by the darkness. Rather, the sign comes and goes without a word from anyone in the account.<sup>108</sup> Instead of focusing on the crowd’s response to the darkness, the reaction of onlookers *to Jesus* is Mark’s central concern. Mark records the confusion and the mockery of the people in response to Jesus’ cry as a declaration of the continued and widespread confusion of the people towards Jesus, even in the face of revelatory phenomena concerning him.<sup>109</sup>

The first half of the parallelism, Mark 15:33–36, illustrates an interesting dynamic: Mark brings the cosmic sign of judgment to the foreground in the pericope, though the focused antagonism of the Jewish leaders toward Jesus remains the central point. “The darkness was a sign of divine judgment upon those who rejected Jesus,” and this sign is unnoticed by those for whom it is intended.<sup>110</sup> What should be taken as a revelation from God about the significance of Jesus’ death is not acknowledged by the witnesses present.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> R. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 1035. Other commentators have noted the event as an allusion to Amos 8:9–10, where the sun is said to go down at noon (i.e., the sixth hour) darkening the earth. Donahue, *Mark*, 447; Collins, *Mark*, 751; Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 1054. This view sees the death of Jesus as an apocalyptic omen, in which judgment is the retribution to be paid Jesus’ executors.

<sup>107</sup> Evans, *Mark*, 512; Brown, *Death*, 1035; Donahue, *Mark*, 447; Collins, *Mark*, 751; Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 1054.

<sup>108</sup> Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 1053, sees that the all-encompassing scope of the miracle (15:33, “over the whole land”) and the power behind it was Mark’s focus, not the subjective experience of those who witness it.

<sup>109</sup> At first they curiously wonder if Jesus is calling out to Elijah (15:35, καὶ τινες τῶν παρεστηκότων ἀκούσαντες ἔλεγον· ἴδε Ἡλίαν φωνεῖ). Then they taunt him, challenging Jesus to have Elijah rescue him if he is the Messiah (15:36, ἄφετε ἴδωμεν εἰ ἔρχεται Ἡλίας καθελεῖν αὐτόν).

<sup>110</sup> Hurtado, *Mark*, 266.

<sup>111</sup> One might even say that at the end of Jesus’ life and ministry, the bleakness of this account for Mark lies more with the hard-heartedness of the Jews than with in the desperation of Jesus as he breathes his last.

## 2. The Tearing of the Veil (Mark 15:37–39)

Gurtner’s research on the tearing of the veil in ancient literature suggests that the action symbolizes the removal of “the cultic barriers between the holy (God) and the less holy (humanity).”<sup>112</sup> He points out that although scholars recognize “there is no precedent for what the tearing of the veil symbolises, there *is* evidence for what the veil itself symbolises.”<sup>113</sup> Gurtner’s work supports the general scholarly view that the inner curtain was the one torn<sup>114</sup> and also cites evidence from rabbinic texts that suggest the veil represents the hiddenness of divine plans from humanity.<sup>115</sup> Hofius says the following in his analysis of rabbinic material: “Der

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<sup>112</sup> Gurtner, *Veil*, 293 cites T. J. Gedder, *Watchwords: Mark 13 in Markan Eschatology*, JSNTSup 26 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 140–45, that there are over 35 ways to interpret the tearing of the veil in published scholarship.

<sup>113</sup> Gurtner, *Veil*, 200, emphasis original. Hofius, surveying numerous rabbinic texts, points out one such parallel rabbis make between the veil and heavens in the Hebrew Bible, “Für uns ist wichtig, daß die Schriftstellen Gen 1,6 ff. und Ex 26,33 einander parallelisiert werden: Wie das Firmament Scheidewand zwischen Himmel und Erde ist, so der Vorhang der Stiftshütte Scheidewand zwischen Allerheiligstem und Heiligem,” O. Hofius, *Der Vorhang vor dem Thron Gottes*, WUNT 14 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1972), 24. The significance of the torn veil for Mark may reach back to the beginning of Gospel. In the baptismal scene, the “heavens split” (Mark 1:10, σχιζομένους τοὺς οὐρανοὺς) just as the veil does in 15:38, using the same word to describe the schism (σχιζω). These two words are found together nowhere else in the NT or the LXX. Collins, *Mark*, 148 observes that *Joseph and Aseneth* contains such a phrase in 14:3, however, with the light from heaven and Aseneth’s “who are you Lord?” question as she falls to the ground, the context resembles more the conversion of Paul than it does the baptism of Jesus. Still, the parallel gives rise to the question—is the splitting of heaven (σχιζω + οὐρανός) a verbal signposts for revelatory experience in the antiquity? Gurtner, “Rending,” 295, mentions from the LXX: Gen 7:11; Ps. 77:23; Isa. 24:18; Ezek. 1:1; and from the GNT: John 1:51; Acts 7:56; 10:11; Rev 4:1; 11:19; 19:11 all have similar Greek expressions where ἀνοίγω is used instead.

<sup>114</sup> Gurtner, *Veil*, 199; Motyer, “Veil,” 155–56 As early as Josephus, and perhaps predating the historian by two centuries or more, the temple curtain is seen to symbolize the heavens. In *Jewish War* 5.5.4, Josephus says that the outer veil, with its earth, wind, and fire themes, “portrayed a panorama of the heavens,” leading Motyer to believe that the outer veil is referenced in Mark 15. Cf. André Pelletier’s discussion of Josephus’s description of the temple veil in, “La tradition synoptique du ‘voile déchiré’ à la lumière des réalités archéologiques,” *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 46 (1958): 168–179, is also cited in Gurtner, *Veil*. D. Juel, *Messiah and Temple*, SBLDS 31 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), 140–42, has a helpful discussion about the veil in which he argues that the outer veil is torn because the tearing of the outer veil would connect this sign to “Jewish traditions about miraculous portents signaling the impending doom of the temple.”

<sup>115</sup> Gurtner, “Rending,” 96, 293, Textual links between the tearing of the heavens in 1:11 and the tearing of the veil in 15:38 have been noticed in scholarly research for many years. See Ulansey, “Torn,” 123–25; Motyer,

Gedanke, daß Gott vor den im Himmel versammelten Frommen verborgen bleibt, ist auch in einem *bSota 49a* überlieferten Ausspruch des R. Acha b. Chanina (Pal. um 300) vorausgesetzt . . . Das wird mit den Worten umschreiben: „Selbst der Vorhang wird vor ihm nicht geschlossen.“<sup>116</sup> The way the veil functioned symbolically in Jewish tradition corresponded to the degree of secrecy God has before humans about his plans or will. Gurtner writes, “The veil is thought to conceal heavenly secrets, with its removal depicting the revelation of biblical truths.”<sup>117</sup> The Gospel of Mark seems to be invoking such a metaphor in the crucifixion of Jesus. That is, with reference to the revelatory experiences in Mark, the veil is an emblem of the revelatory separation between God and humanity and therefore humanity’s inability to know God unless God were to be revealed. As Mark’s Gospel describes the veil’s tearing, and simultaneously links it with the rending of the heavens in Jesus’ baptism, the Evangelist’s message is clarified: for Mark, Jesus’ crucifixion is a revelatory moment, bridging the gap between God and humanity, showing that the secrets of God are on display in the person of Jesus.

### Summary of the Content of the Crucifixion Revelatory Experience

The content of the crucifixion phenomena seems to reinforce the revelatory development of

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“Veil,” 157; Jackson, “Death,” 23, 27; Malbon, *Narrative Space*, 187 n. 93. For background on the interpretation of the veil itself, see Gurtner, “Rending,” 292–306; Gurtner, *Veil*, 1–28. Motyer, “Veil,” 155, therefore sees these events as forming an *inclusio* in the Gospel. In addition to the presence of σχίζω, both passages have a υἱός θεοῦ declaration (Gurtner, “Rending,” 294), and contain revelatory phenomena in the descent of the dove, the three hours of darkness, and tearing of the veil. Motyer, “Veil,” 155–56, also mentions that both passages contain Elijah-symbolism, both have a “descending element” to them, the dove and the veil splitting from top to bottom, and both contain cognates of πνεῦμα in 1:10 and in 15:39, where Jesus is said to “expire” (ἐκπνέω). However, these parallels are not compelling enough to include above. See also B. M. F. van Iersel, “He Will Baptize You With the Holy Spirit (Mark 1,8),” in *Text and Testimony* (Kampen: J H Kok, 1988).

<sup>116</sup> Hofius, *Vorhang*, 7.

<sup>117</sup> Gurtner, *Veil*, 96.

Mark's Gospel. The three hours of darkness are a sign of God's displeasure at the death of Jesus. The tearing of the veil implies that Jesus' death eliminates the revelatory "barriers between God and humanity."<sup>118</sup> At least in regards to the darkness, this phenomenon takes place in full sight of the crowds, and therefore full opportunity to respond in some way.

### *Centurion's Response*

D. R. Goodwin's 1886 article on the centurion's υἱὸς θεοῦ shows a number of instances in which anarthrous Greek predicates are "unquestionably" definite.<sup>119</sup> Therefore, the real question in this debate is, "Does the character of the speaker in this particular case . . . require or suggest [the

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<sup>118</sup> Gurtner, *Veil*, 200, notices what he calls a "striking congruence" between the New Testament use of the veil at the crucifixion and Second Temple soteriological hopes. See also his D. M. Gurtner, "On the Other Side of Disaster: Soteriology in 2 Baruch," in *This World and the World to Come: Soteriology in Early Judaism*, ed. D. M. Gurtner, LSTS 74 (London: T&T Clark, 2011).

<sup>119</sup> D. R. Goodwin, "Theou Huios, Matt. xxvii. 54, and Mark xv. 39," *JSBLE* 6 (1886): 129–31, cites Luke 1:35, Matt 27:43; 14:33; John 19:7. Forty years later, Colwell followed by Harner (40 years later) analyze instances in which anarthrous nouns are used before copulative verbs, using Mark 15:39 as one of his two examples. E. C. Colwell, "A Definite Rule for the Use of the Article in the Greek New Testament," *JBL* 52 (1933): 12–21; P. B. Harner, "Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns," *JBL* 92 (1973), 81. France, *Mark*, 650. The primary obstacle, says Harner, to taking υἱὸς θεοῦ as "a son of God" is that Mark could have plainly made the phrase indefinite ("a son of God") by moving the verb ἦν in front of the nouns υἱὸς θεοῦ. This unambiguous construction (verb + anarthrous nouns = indefinite construction) is used nineteen other times in Mark's Gospel and would have been the natural choice for the author to connote the centurion's declaration that Jesus is one of many "sons of God." Conversely, if Mark's centurion said that Jesus is "the Son of God," another grammatical arrangement would have been unambiguous as well. Placing the copulative verb before an arthrous noun, as in Mark 1:11, would have made the construction unmistakably definite.

Given Mark's equivocal Greek construction (cf. Mark 1:11; 9:7; 3:11), Harner suggests an interpretive option that moves the emphasis of the passage away from definiteness or indefiniteness. He contends that definiteness or indefiniteness may be secondary to the "qualitative significance of the predicate (Harner, "Qualitative," 80–81). By "qualitative significance," Harner means that Mark is calling attention to the *meaning* of Jesus' sonship by the centurion's declaration rather than the declaration of the title itself. Instead of designating Jesus as *the* Son of God, Mark calls attention to the way Jesus' sonship (as expressed through suffering and death, not military triumph and political domination) is nevertheless divine. After all, the text says that the centurion, standing in front of Jesus as a symbol of Roman power and justice, was moved by the way Jesus died (15:39, ὅτι οὕτως ἐξέπνευσεν εἶπεν· ἀληθῶς οὗτος ὁ ἄνθρωπος υἱὸς θεοῦ ἦν). "Thus, the centurion is the first human being whom Mark represents as affirming Jesus' sonship" in the way Jesus himself affirmed it. See also T. H. Kim, "The Anarthrous υἱὸς θεοῦ in Mark 15,39 and the Roman Imperial Cult," *Biblica* 79 (1998): 221–41, who argues that the term was used exclusively of Augustus and therefore was definite when used of the emperor as well.

anarthrous] translation?”<sup>120</sup> Iverson puts the question in different terms when he asks, not what the centurion *says*, but “What precisely did the centurion *mean* when speaking these words.”<sup>121</sup> He follows this question with the insightful statement, “While various grammatical and historical issues weigh on the interpretation of this statement, the verse hinges on elements that are not readily obvious in the textual remains of Mark’s story.”<sup>122</sup>

Fenton and Goodacre notice the palpable irony in certain Markan scenes and suggest that the declaration may have been sarcastic.<sup>123</sup> He cites the possibility “that ‘this man’ should be translated ‘this fellow’, disparagingly, as in Acts 6:13.”<sup>124</sup> Goodacre observes that the centurion’s comment comes after seeing the way Jesus died, not seeing any of the miraculous phenomena, therefore a sarcastic reading is the natural one.<sup>125</sup>

Camery-Hoggatt’s monograph on the use of irony in Mark exhaustively surveys the Gospel.<sup>126</sup> He notes Mark 15:16–32 contains references to the ironic mockery of the soldiers (15:16–20) and the onlookers as Jesus is crucified (15:21–32). The irony in these accounts, he says, is “readily seen. Who can miss the sarcastic pathos of the cloak, or the crown of thorns, or the spittle? On the surface, this is gallows humour.”<sup>127</sup> Mark’s confessing centurion in 15:39, however, is not *obviously* sarcastic. Instead, Mark inserts “truly” (ἀληθῶς) as an indicator that

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<sup>120</sup> Goodwin, “Theou Huios,” 129.

<sup>121</sup> K. R. Iverson, “A Centurion’s ‘Confession’: A Performance-Critical Analysis of Mark 15:39,” *JBL* 130 (2011): 329–50, italics original.

<sup>122</sup> Iverson, “Mark 15:39,” 329. Iverson’s article analyzes the centurion’s declaration in light of how the scene would have been read/performed and would have appealed to an audience, even given the darkness and irony of the crucifixion.

<sup>123</sup> J. Fenton, *Finding the Way Through Mark* (London: Mowbray, 1995); Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 1058; M. S. Goodacre, *The Case Against Q* (Harrisburg, PA: Continuum, 2002), 160 n. 28.

<sup>124</sup> Fenton, *Finding*, 111.

<sup>125</sup> Goodacre, *Case*, 160 n. 28.

<sup>126</sup> J. Camery-Hoggatt, *Irony in Mark’s Gospel*, SNTSMS 72 (Cambridge: CUP, 1992).

<sup>127</sup> Camery-Hoggatt, *Irony*, 175.



the centurion's declaration is earnest.<sup>128</sup> The only other time Mark uses the adverb ἀληθῶς is in 14:70, when the bystanders accuse Peter of being a follower of Jesus ("certainly you are one of them, for you also are a Galilean," ἀληθῶς ἐξ αὐτῶν εἶ, καὶ γὰρ Γαλιλαῖος εἶ.).<sup>129</sup> In 14:70, the phrase after καὶ elaborates on the ἀληθῶς making sure that the adverb cannot be taken as anything but an intensifier.<sup>130</sup> Therefore, Markan word usage and context suggests that the centurion's declaration is a genuine laudation of Jesus.<sup>131</sup> Marcus, followed by Iverson, take the research on Markan irony into account and the apparent sincerity of the centurion when describing this scene as "parodic exaltation."<sup>132</sup> He writes, "The mockery that has transformed kingship into a joke encounters a sharper mockery that unmasks it, so that the derision of kingship is itself derided and true royalty emerges through negation of the negation."<sup>133</sup>

Just as significant a matter for this thesis involves the *cause* of the centurion's confession.<sup>134</sup> After the three hours of darkness, one might expect a response from the centurion. Yet Mark specifically recounts that the centurion's statement is a response to Jesus' death (15:39, ὅτι οὕτως ἐξέπνευσεν). That is, "the reason for the confession is unmistakably the death of Jesus itself, not some miracle or catastrophe of nature that accompanies it."<sup>135</sup> God's

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<sup>128</sup> Iverson, "Mark 15:39," 335.

<sup>129</sup> The contrast between Peter and the centurion is marked. Peter, one of those closest to Jesus is now distant in his allegiance to Jesus, whereas this unlikely centurion is now "truly" declaring Jesus to be God's Son. "It should be emphasized that the centurion's insight is not more unlikely than the obtuseness of those who had followed Jesus and had been told clearly and repeatedly of his impending fate. Arguably, the apparent inappropriateness of the centurion makes the confession itself that much more dramatic." This is the "christological paradox" after which P. G. Davis, "Mark's Christological Paradox," *JSNT* 35 (1989): 3–18, 15, named his article. "The closest witness to the saving event announces the true identity of Jesus."

<sup>130</sup> L. Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 726.

<sup>131</sup> Tannehill, "Narrative Christology," 88.

<sup>132</sup> J. Marcus, "Crucifixion as Parodic Exaltation," *JBL* 125 (2006): 73–87, 86, describes the crucifixion as a scene in which "mockery is mocked." See also Iverson, "Mark 15:39," 350.  
<sup>133</sup> Marcus, "Parodic," 87.

<sup>134</sup> Whether the centurion's confession is "Christian" or not is inconsequential. Given the fact that the soldier calls Jesus "God's son" makes the statement "religious" in nature, not simply one of admiration.

<sup>135</sup> J. R. Michaels, "The Centurion's Confession and the Spear Thrust," *CBQ* 29 (1967): 102–109, 108.

revelatory activity at the crucifixion is not the stimulus for reverence in Mark's characters, but Jesus himself is the impetus for the centurion's positive response.

Furthermore, the centurion's specific response to Jesus' death—declaring him to be God's Son—is not a response that was informed by either the phenomena or by something Jesus says before dying. Instead, Mark portrays a disconnect here between the centurion's declaration and what he could have reasonably been expected to know based on the events of the crucifixion. That is, Mark's only revelatory event that seems to produce a positive response towards Jesus, does not deliver christological content then assumed by the new believer. Instead, the centurion's response is detached from the phenomena or any content the phenomena seem to convey. In Mark 15:39, the centurion declares what Peter fails to and in so doing specifically responds to the way Jesus dies, not any revelatory phenomena present in the scene (15:39, Ἰδὼν δὲ ὁ κεντυρίων ὁ παρεστηκὼς ἐξ ἐναντίας αὐτοῦ ὅτι οὕτως ἐξέπνευσεν εἶπεν . . .).<sup>136</sup> The same can be said for the mocking crowds. None of these witnesses notices the revelatory phenomena but the sole focus of their responses is Jesus. Neither the three hours of darkness nor the tearing of the temple veil is noticed, but only Jesus on the cross, whom the crowds deride and the centurion honors.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Tannehill, "Disciples," 404. Thus, this section is misnamed the "centurion's "response," since his declaration is neither a response to the darkness nor the veil. The temple veil was torn in the verse prior to the centurion's declaration. The location of the crucifixion, Golgotha outside of Jerusalem, would have made rending of the veil impossible for the centurion to see. He would not have seen it, nor would he probably have known what it meant as a Roman soldier. For an alternative that explains how the centurion could have seen the tearing of the veil, see Jackson, "Death," 16–37, who says that the Markan crucifixion happened on the Mount of Olives, from where the tearing of the temple curtain would have been visible.

<sup>137</sup> The tearing of the veil would not have been visible to the crowds at Golgotha anyway.

### *Subsequent Context*

After the centurion responds positively<sup>138</sup> to Jesus on the cross, he appears in the burial scene when Pilate asks for verification that Jesus is dead (Mark 15:44–45).<sup>139</sup> During this interaction with Pilate, the centurion only confirms that Jesus is dead and nothing more. He is not heard from again in Mark’s story. Instead, the narrative follows with a reference to three women watching from afar and then to the burial of Jesus by Joseph of Arimathea (Mark 15:40–47).

Regarding the women, “We know virtually nothing about these women. . . . [other than Mark’s] note of editorial reserve, since it portrays them as unable or unwilling to come to Jesus’ aid in his hour of distress, perhaps out of fear.”<sup>140</sup> Marcus concludes, however, that the Gospel depicts these women positively because of the author’s comment about them following Jesus in Galilee (Mark 15:41). One detail Mark does include, however, is that two of the three women see where Jesus is laid and indeed help Joseph lay Jesus’ body in the tomb (Mark 15:47).<sup>141</sup> Hooker rightly concludes that the women are here to prepare for their participation in the story at the empty tomb.<sup>142</sup>

Joseph of Arimathea is a “member of the Jewish elite, which has hitherto been overwhelmingly hostile” to Jesus and now demonstrates that he is a friend.<sup>143</sup> Mark adds the note that Joseph is ὃς καὶ αὐτὸς ἦν προσδεχόμενος τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ (Mark 15:43) and

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<sup>138</sup> Regardless of whether or not the first readers would have understood it as an early Christian confession.  
<sup>139</sup> This presumes the ὁ κεντυρίων in Mark 15:39 is the antecedent of τὸν κεντυρίωνα and τοῦ κεντυρίωνος in 15:44–45, as does Boring, *Mark*, 440.  
<sup>140</sup> Marcus, *Mark 8–16*, 1066–69.  
<sup>141</sup> Stein, *Mark*, 725 n. 6, says “they laid” shows that the women were part of the process.  
<sup>142</sup> Hooker, *Mark*, 379.  
<sup>143</sup> Marcus, *Mark 8–16*, 1069.

thus shows that Joseph recognizes Jesus’ participation in God’s Kingdom work, albeit without saying when Joseph begins to think this way.<sup>144</sup>

### *Conclusion to the Markan Crucifixion*

The three hours of darkness followed by Jesus’ cry and the mockery of the Jews in the crowd paint a dismal picture. This darkness is widely thought to foreshadow God’s judgment for the crucifixion of Jesus. From Gurtner’s research, the tearing of the veil represents the removal of the revelatory barrier between God and people. Yet neither phenomenon is noticed by anyone in context.<sup>145</sup> The centurion’s acclamation is a response to Jesus not the revelatory portents. In this way, Jesus’ death becomes the revelatory event that Markan revelatory phenomena do not possess and demonstrates the authority that is ascribed to him at the transfiguration (cf. also Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34). Revelatory acts of God, however, again do not occur in Mark to engender positive responses to Jesus on the part of the witnesses.

## The Resurrection (Mark 16:1-8)

Mark’s final revelatory event is only eight verses long and ends Mark’s Gospel with the climactic scene of the women and the “young man” at Jesus’ empty tomb.<sup>146</sup> Taylor describes

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<sup>144</sup> There is debate about whether Joseph requests Jesus’ body because of his adherence to Jewish law or his followership of Jesus. R. E. Brown, “The Burial of Jesus,” *CBQ* 50 (1988): 233–45, takes the former view. However, the text says Joseph has to “gather up the courage” (τολμήσας) to risk asking Pilate for Jesus’ body, suggesting that he is at least sympathizes with Jesus. For a summary of the contributors to each side of this discussion, see Stein, *Mark*, 724.

<sup>145</sup> Indeed, the veil would not have been visible from the crucifixion scene. No one in the vicinity of the temple notices either.

<sup>146</sup> I take the scholarly consensus that the Gospel of Mark ends at 16:8 and only later were the subsequent verses added to the tradition. For an extended discussion on the text critical issues and witnesses, see B. M. Metzger,

the “dignity and restraint of the narrative, the absence of any attempt to describe the resurrection itself or to depict an appearance of the Risen Christ.”<sup>147</sup> The risen messiah is proclaimed but not produced by the author, but scholars show that this brief chapter is a fitting end to Mark’s Gospel.<sup>148</sup> The following section will analyze (1) the content, (2) the response of the women, and (3) Mark 16 in the context of the entire Gospel, as this chapter concludes its study on the role of Markan revelatory experiences for reverence for Jesus.

### *Content of the Resurrection*

#### **1. The Appearance of the Young Man (Mark 16:3–5)**

Mark describes the messenger of Jesus’ resurrection as a “young man” (νεανίσκον) dressed in white (περιβεβλημένον στολὴν λευκὴν).<sup>149</sup> Earlier discussion about Jesus’ “white” appearance at the transfiguration demonstrated that white garments are a sign of heavenly manifestation.<sup>150</sup> Mark’s description of the young man “seated on the right hand” (καθήμενον ἐν τοῖς δεξιotoῖς) is used in five other contexts in the Gospel, four of which are specific references to the place of

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*A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 102–107.

<sup>147</sup> Taylor, *Mark*, 603.

<sup>148</sup> See L. W. Hurtado, “The Women, the Tomb, and the Climax of Mark,” in *A Wandering Galilean: Essays in Honour of Sean Freyne*, eds. Z. Rodgers, M. Daly-Denton, A. F. McKinley, 427–50 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), contra R. C. Miller, “Mark’s Empty Tomb and Other Translation Fables in Classical Antiquity,” *JBL* 129 (2010): 759–76, 759, who calls prevailing scholarship on Mark’s final chapter “delusional” in its current state because, among other things, it views Mark Gospel as a Jewish text rather than a Greco-Roman fable and therefore fails to see Mark 16 as a Hellenistic account of the translation of a demigod.

<sup>149</sup> Mark uses “young man” to describe the disciple who flees Jesus’ arrest naked in 14:51–52, so one may first assume that this young man is a human being as well. However, Mark’s description of his clothing and the removal of the stone from the entrance both indicate this is an angel. The only other place in Mark’s Gospel that mentions angels is at the temptation in Mark 1:13. This brief comment simply mentions that the angels came “serving” (διηκόνουν) Jesus. By contrast, Matthew and Luke had long established the authority and purpose of angels in their prologues—something Mark has yet to do even until the final chapter.

<sup>150</sup> Collins, *Mark*, 795; Gundry, *Mark*, 991; P. Perkins, *Resurrection: New Testament Witness and Contemporary Reflection* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1984), 118. The temptation records that angels “attend to” Jesus, but Mark does not add any detail beyond this. Compared to Matthew and Luke, who include a number of angelic appearances, Mark’s Gospel has only that of the young man in chapter 16.

authority in heaven.<sup>151</sup> Collins concludes that the “young man here is portrayed as symbolically *similar* to the risen Jesus. Just as the risen Jesus is enthroned at the right hand of God [12:35–37], so this young man is described as ‘sitting on the right.’”<sup>152</sup> Collins’ point above is debatable and Porter shows that the emphasis of the description is definitely on the man’s appearance not his position in the tomb.<sup>153</sup> But these observations suggests that the account of the young man visually conforms to Markan conventions for establishing the authority within his Gospel.<sup>154</sup>

## 2. The Resurrection Announcement (Mark 16:5–6)

The young man announces the resurrection by appealing to Jesus’ earlier predictions of the event that establish Jesus’ revelatory authority for his followers.<sup>155</sup> The young man’s reference to Jesus as “the Nazarene” is likely only a further identifier. Ilan’s lexicon of Jewish names cites Jesus as one of the six most popular names in his day.<sup>156</sup> Adding, “the Nazarene” is a certain way to distinguish him from others who share this name.

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<sup>151</sup> Mark 10:37, 40; 12:36; 14:62; 15:27; 16:5. All of these uses assume the word “hand.” Mark 15:27 is the one exception, with the one of the thieves described as situated on Jesus’ right side (ἓνα ἐκ δεξιῶν καὶ ἓνα ἐξ ἐναντίων αὐτοῦ).

<sup>152</sup> Collins, *Mark*, 795, italics original. See also Gundry, *Mark*, 990–91.

<sup>153</sup> S. E. Porter, “Verbal Aspect and Discourse Function in Mark 16:1–8: Three Significant Instances,” in *Studies in the Greek Bible: Essays in Honor of Francis T. Gignac, S. J.*, (ed.) J. Corley and V. Skemp, 123–37 (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2008), 132–33.

<sup>154</sup> F. J. Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002), 344; Evans, *Mark*, 534. For removal of the stone itself, Mark uses the perfect passive indicative form ἀποκεκύλισται (Mark 16:4). Porter, “Mark 16:1–8,” 130, says, “The use of the passive voice . . . so that the explicit agency can be grammatically demoted. No doubt, some force was at work in its removal.”

<sup>155</sup> Collins, *Mark*, 796, also sees the former statement as the angel as a statement of the young man’s revelatory authority, because he “knows the motivation of the women for coming to the tomb.” Although this is a possibility, one need not assume that the angel is attempting to demonstrate his prescience in the situation. If the women come to the tomb at a time when most people are asleep bearing spices used to anoint bodies, any bystander can infer that they are seeking to anoint Jesus.

<sup>156</sup> T. Ilan, *Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity: Part I: Palestine 330 BCE–200 CE*, TSAJ 91 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 56–57; also quoted in R. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 67–84, who engages extensively with Ilan’s work.

The description of Jesus as “crucified” or “the crucified one” (Mark 16:6, τὸν ἐσταυρωμένον) is another notable feature of the young man’s announcement.<sup>157</sup> First, ἐσταυρωμένον is a perfect participle and is “anything but a matter-of-fact statement, but draws attention to the one being sought, who is characterized as the one in the crucified state.”<sup>158</sup> That is, Jesus’ status as “one having been crucified” is the focus of the angel’s statement, even at the resurrection announcement, which may show Mark’s stress on the significance of Jesus as the angel is in the process of telling the women he is risen.<sup>159</sup>

Second, the half-dozen σταυρώ references of Mark 15 coupled with the unique Markan emphasis on Jesus’ πτώμα, seems to give the resurrection announcement added weight.<sup>160</sup> Hurtado notices the conspicuous place of πτώμα-language in Mark’s account of Jesus’ death and proposes “that the use of ‘corpse’ here further indicates a Markan concern to stress the forensic (even brutal) reality of Jesus’ death . . . which will make the events of 16:1–8 all the more striking.”<sup>161</sup> The young man offers the women evidence of Jesus’ bodily resurrection when pointing to the specific place where he was laid and says, οὐκ ἔστιν ὧδε· ἴδε ὁ τόπος ὅπου ἔθηκαν αὐτόν (16:6).<sup>162</sup> Several commentators mention that asyndeton (the absence of a conjunction) increases the intensity of the announcement.<sup>163</sup>

The message of the resurrection of Jesus is not new to Mark’s Gospel. Mark 8:31–33, 9:30–32, 10:32–34, and 14:28 record Jesus’ assertion that he will one day raise from the dead.

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<sup>157</sup> Jesus’ entry into and exit from the “realm of the dead” prohibits interpreters from comparing him with Greco-Roman apotheosis/hero stories. See P. Bolt, “Mark 16:1–8: The Empty Tomb of a Hero?” *TynBul* 47 (1996): 27–37.

<sup>158</sup> Porter, “Mark 16:1–8,” 134.

<sup>159</sup> Contra Luke, who puts the emphasis on Jesus as “the living one.” Porter, “Mark 16:1–8,” 136.

<sup>160</sup> Mark 15:13, 14, 15, 20, 24, 25, 27.

<sup>161</sup> Hurtado, *Climax*, 432–33.

<sup>162</sup> Hurtado, *Climax*, 433.

<sup>163</sup> Two examples are Taylor, *Mark*, 608 and Gundry, *Mark*, 990–93.

The young man’s announcement does not offer this information for the first time, but rather confirms the fulfillment of Jesus’ resurrection predictions. The angel recalls as much for the women when saying, “as he told you” in 16:7 (καθὼς εἶπεν ὑμῖν). As Schubert says, “Whatever one may think about the ending of Mark, this gospel . . . achieves a simple and effective conclusion with the story of the empty tomb . . . consistent with and satisfactory in view of everything which led up to it.”<sup>164</sup> In other words, this Markan scene establishes continuity with the preceding context and thereby emphasizes a real, bodily resurrection.

### 3. The Command to Tell (Mark 16:7)

The young man first tells the women not to be afraid and uses the same verb (ἐκθαμβέω) that was used of the women in Mark 16:5. Porter calls this “lexical cohesion,” in which the latter verb answers the state produced by the former verb.<sup>165</sup> The young man then says to the women, “but go and tell his disciples and Peter” (Mark 16:7, ἀλλὰ ὑπάγετε εἰπατε τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ καὶ τῷ Πέτρῳ) highlighting the need for the community of believers to hear the news that Jesus is risen. In light of the announcement of Jesus’ resurrection, the young man emphasizes his instructions to the women—namely, to go tell others.<sup>166</sup> The language used by Mark is not that of reproof as in Luke 24:5–6. Rather, the tone of the young man is more “declarative,” as he seemingly ignores the women’s failure to remember Jesus’ predictions about his death and resurrection.

The specific mention of Peter with the other disciples likely has Peter’s denials in mind.

Mark 14:66-72 records Peter’s threefold denial of Jesus and his grief afterwards. As Collins

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<sup>164</sup> P. Schubert, “The Structure and Significance of Luke 24,” in *Neutestamentliche Studien für Rudolf Bultmann*, (ed.) W. Eltester, 165–86 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1957), 167.

<sup>165</sup> Porter, “Mark 16:1–8,” 134.

<sup>166</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 992.



notes, “Jesus is reaching out to [Peter], through the angel, in spite of his triple denial . . . the implication is that his failure is not permanent.” Jesus means to restore Peter from his past rejection of Jesus as he prepares Peter to lead the burgeoning company of Jesus-followers. Tannehill adds, “After speaking of the disciples as scattered sheep [Mark 14:27] . . . this statement anticipates a shift in the disciples’ situation as scattered sheep following the resurrection.”<sup>167</sup> Therefore, the command to tell others anticipates a vibrant believing community thereafter.

### **Summary of the Content of the Resurrection Experience**

The young man in Mark 16:1–8 is the only angelic character to make an appearance in the Second Gospel, thus making his appearance perhaps even more striking than he would otherwise be.<sup>168</sup> Mark substantiates the credentials of the young man at the tomb through his “white” appearance and by likening the man to Jesus both symbolically (“on the right”) and verbally, as the young man quotes Jesus’ prophecy during his earthly ministry. The young man’s reference to Jesus as “the crucified” places the emphasis on his “crucified” state as the resurrection announcement is made. Therefore, this final revelatory act of Mark’s Gospel uses the heavenly appearance of the man, the crucified status of Jesus, and the central place of the believing community as the foundation of the message conveyed to the women. Now the question is, “Do the women respond appropriately to the content?”

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<sup>167</sup> Tannehill, “Narrative Christology,” 83.

<sup>168</sup> Mark 1:13 only mentions that angels serve Jesus without describing them or giving them any other place in the narrative.

*Response of the Women*

A few observations about Mark's description of the women in chapter 16 show his focus on their experience at the empty tomb.<sup>169</sup> First, Mark uses two verbal forms to describe the moment when the women first realize that the stone is rolled away. "Looking up, they see" (Mark 16:4, ἀναβλέψασαι θεωροῦσιν) describes them raising their heads and perceiving the miracle.<sup>170</sup> Moloney calls this use of words "pleonastic" when saying, "This is no ordinary seeing . . . the reader senses in this exaggerated 'seeing' the hint of a sight of the revelation of God's action."<sup>171</sup> Whether or not Mark intends an "exaggerated 'seeing'" is questionable, since Porter shows that these words (an aorist participle and present indicative) simply indicate the actions of physically directing their eyes to the area around the tomb and then noticing that the stone is displaced.<sup>172</sup>

Second, Mark then describes the women entering the tomb using an aorist participle and indicative (Mark 16:5, Καὶ εἰσελθοῦσαι εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον εἶδον . . .). Porter describes the women as the continuing, "theme of the paragraph unit" as they go into the tomb and see the young man.<sup>173</sup> This construction is simpler than the one above, but follows the same progression starting with background material (εἰσελθοῦσαι) to foreground material (εἶδον) and ending with the "stative" action central (i.e. what he calls the "foreground") to this verbal idea.<sup>174</sup> Mark 16:5 ends with a first reference to the women's fear at the sight of the young man (ἐξεθαμβήθησαν).

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<sup>169</sup> Porter, "Mark 16:1–8," 137. For a survey of the history of research on the women's silence in Mark 16, see C. E. Joynes, "The Sound of Silence: Interpreting Mark 16:1–8 Through the Centuries," *Interpretation* 65 (2011): 18–29.

<sup>170</sup> Theissen, *Erleben*, 161, believes Mark's source for this account is Mary Magdalene, as it relates the women's vivid response to the events.

<sup>171</sup> Moloney, *Mark*, 344.

<sup>172</sup> Porter, "Mark 16:1–8," 130.

<sup>173</sup> Porter, "Mark 16:1–8," 132.

<sup>174</sup> Porter, "Mark 16:1–8," 132.

Third, Mark makes five references to the women’s astonishment or fear concerning the announcement of Jesus’ resurrection. The appearance of the young man “greatly alarms” the women (Mark 16:5, ἐξεθαμβήθησαν) followed by his command that they “not be alarmed” (Mark 16:6, μὴ ἐκθαμβεῖσθε).<sup>175</sup> Mark 16:8 then describes the women as seized by trembling (εἶχεν γὰρ αὐτὰς τρόμος) and amazement (ἐκστασις). Mark then ends his Gospel with another reiteration of their fear in Mark 16:8b (ἐφοβοῦντο). Mark emphasizes how disturbed these women are by the things they saw and heard. This intensity of emotion alone is unparalleled in the rest of the Gospel. No other Markan pericope that uses any of the above words (θαμβέω, φόβω, τρόμος, ἔκστασις) also repeats them in context.<sup>176</sup> All other fifteen occurrences of these “fear” words in Mark appear only once in each passage—that is, they are not used with each other in the same context as in Mark 16. By comparison, Mark 16 is trumping up the magnitude of the resurrection by its fourfold repetition of the women’s astonishment.

Fourth, apart from the women’s emotional response to the young man and his message, Mark says they leave without reporting the event to anyone (καὶ οὐδενὶ οὐδὲν εἶπαν). Commentators have puzzled over this final line of the Gospel, wondering if Mark’s record is saying these women disobey the command of the angels.<sup>177</sup> Tannehill calls Mark 16:8 “an indication of further failure by Jesus’ followers.”<sup>178</sup> However, Collins argues that Mark’s ending says nothing about whether or not the women eventually report back to the disciples. She says that verse 8 “points backward, not forward. . . . Their silence is a result of their being struck with awe at the extraordinary events. . . . The text does not address the question whether the women

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<sup>175</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 991.

<sup>176</sup> Mark 1:27; 4:41; 5:15, 33, 36; 5:42; 6:20, 50; 9:15, 32; 10:24, 32; 11:18, 32; 12:12; 14:33.

<sup>177</sup> So R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1963), 263 and J. M. Creed, “The Conclusion of the Gospel According to Saint Mark,” *JTS* 31 (1930): 175–80.

<sup>178</sup> Tannehill, “Disciples,” 393–94.

eventually gave the disciples and Peter the message.”<sup>179</sup> And Kee follows this by commenting on empty tomb as “the final mode of heavenly confirmation of Jesus . . . [that] God stands behind the career of Jesus.”<sup>180</sup> Even in their astonishment, the women see the angelic announcement as yet another demonstration of God on Jesus’ behalf. Catchpole concludes similarly making his argument from a syntactical parallel in Mark 1:44, where Jesus heals the leper and tells the man ὅρα μηδενὶ μηδὲν εἶπης, ἀλλὰ ὕπαγε σεαυτὸν δεῖξον τῷ ἱερεῖ. Catchpole uses this text as a parallel for 16:8, καὶ οὐδενὶ οὐδὲν εἶπαν. His conclusion is that neither statement prevents “disclosure to a specified individual. [Each statement] simply relates to the broad mass of persons, the public at large.”<sup>181</sup>

Therefore, the assertion that Mark’s Gospel ends disconcertingly or with a portrayal of the women’s disobedience does not match the linguistic and contextual data analyzed above. Rather, Mark’s use of language seems to focus specifically on “the women’s encounter of Jesus’ empty tomb.”<sup>182</sup> Therefore the repeated emphasis on their fear in the event and the abrupt ending as they flee depicts how unsettling this event really is those followers of Jesus who assume he is dead and gone. On the contrary, these women respond appropriately to what they have just seen and leave the tomb to tell the disciples and Peter the good news.

### *Mark 16 in Context of the Entire Gospel*

Had the women not obeyed the angel, the movement may have sputtered, as the disciples would fail to meet Jesus themselves in Galilee. And as Hurtado notes, “otherwise, of course, readers

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<sup>179</sup> Collins, *Mark*, 799–800. See also O. Linton, “Der Vermißte Markusschluß,” *TB* 8 (1929): 229–34.

<sup>180</sup> Kee, *Miracle*, 160.

<sup>181</sup> Catchpole, “Fearful,” 6.

<sup>182</sup> Porter, “Mark 16:1–8,” 137.

would be hard pressed to imagine how the author could relate the incidents in question!”<sup>183</sup>

However, the women do respond favorably to the angelic appearance at the empty tomb as Mark implies their report to the disciples and Jesus’ appearance to them in Galilee. Unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark does not elaborate on this community emphasis by recording the appearances of Jesus to his followers or their early reaction to his resurrection. But latent in the angel’s command to tell, is the idea that Jesus’ followers would soon be restored from their previous rejection of Jesus (so Peter) as the resurrection event propels the early Christians forward as a movement.

Also, the young man’s command to tell others ends with a reference to Jesus’ prediction of his resurrection and return to Galilee.<sup>184</sup> This prophecy of Jesus indicates the angel’s role to substantiate Jesus’ revelatory authority in the Gospel rather than provide a brand new divine disclosure. The angel finishes his command with a statement of Jesus’ whereabouts. Mark 16:7 says, “he goes before you into Galilee.” Beyond fulfilling Jesus’ own prophecy about his post-resurrection journey to Galilee (Mark 14:28), this statement reinforces the importance of geography in Mark. Mark’s Gospel begins in Judea with John’s baptism of Jesus. Jesus then travels to Galilee to begin his public ministry as he again makes his way South to Jerusalem for the crucifixion. Following the resurrection, Jesus returns to Galilee where his ministry began, in order to appear to his followers there also.

Therefore, Mark’s Gospel geographically comes “full circle,” as the angel reports Jesus’ intention to travel ahead of his compatriots to Galilee. Although the ending to Mark’s Gospel has

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<sup>183</sup> Hurtado, “Climax,” 438.

<sup>184</sup> Collins, *Mark*, 797.

often been called “unusual,”<sup>185</sup> perhaps a better adjective is “suggestive.” Mark 16 suggests that the place in which Jesus’ public ministry began would also be the place in which his weak-kneed followers would be restored fully to Jesus. “Just as the original mission began and flourished in Galilee, so now it is to Galilee that they must go to meet their risen Lord. . . . It is the promise not just that they will gather again and the cause will not die. It is much more specific than that: ‘You will see him’!”<sup>186</sup>

## Conclusion to Mark’s Gospel

The revelatory acts of God in Mark are moments of divine mediation and that sometimes the setting in which characters express reverence for Jesus. Mark’s first revelatory act of God at Jesus’ baptism only says that Jesus is aware of the phenomena given on his behalf. No response is given until the verses following the revelatory experience, in which Jesus follows the Spirit’s prompting into the desert to be tempted by Satan.

The transfiguration account is the second revelatory event of Mark’s Gospel and illustrates a shift in the revelatory emphasis of the author. In this vision, Jesus himself participates with Elijah and Moses, and the voice from heaven exhorts the disciples as witnesses to “listen to him” (9:7). This exhortation indicates that the revelatory “center of gravity” begins to shift from God to Jesus, as God confers his own authority upon Jesus. These followers of Jesus, however, do not respond positively to Jesus in the subsequent context and manifest no new reverence for Jesus than they have before the event takes place.

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<sup>185</sup> Stein, *Mark*, 733.

<sup>186</sup> France, *Mark*, 222–23.

The crucifixion phenomena reinforce the “transfer” that begins at the transfiguration, as God’s own revelatory initiations drift into the background in lieu of that of Jesus. God intervenes in this scene and yet the characters do not notice. Instead, the crucified Jesus on the cross is the sole focus of the narrative. The centurion—with no mention either of the darkness or the veil but only of Jesus’ death—declares Jesus to be God’s Son. In this event, Mark illustrates that the revelatory emphasis of the Gospel has shifted from God to Jesus, who now elicits a positive response from the soldier. Still, since the revelatory phenomena are not the impetus for the centurion’s change, one still cannot say that this Markan revelatory act of God prompts the declaration but only these acts provide the *context* for such a response.

Finally, in the angel’s declaration of Jesus’ resurrection, he refers to Jesus’ words in Mark 14:28 as fulfilled in the resurrection. Jesus is the authority to whom the angel appeals, not God. However, Mark’s resurrection has the distinction among the four Gospels of being the only one in which Jesus does not appear. The women flee the tomb fearful without speaking to anyone as they run to tell the disciples and Mark’s implication is that when Jesus appears in Galilee, then his followers will rally.

In summary, the conclusions reached in this research on Mark’s Gospel are:

- 1. The revelatory acts of God in Mark can provide the context, but are not the foundation of characters’ positive responses to Jesus.** Revelatory experiences in Mark are “hit-and-miss,” with some stimulating a corresponding positive response and others falling flat. In all of the events surveyed, characters do not produce responses that specifically match the detail of the phenomena, but where positive responses are shown, these are more general in nature. Therefore, to state the matter negatively, revelatory acts

of God do not have a 1-to-1 correspondence with reverence for Jesus in Mark. To state the matter positively, the revelatory acts of God *can* be a stimulus for reverence for Jesus in some contexts.

2. **The revelatory acts of God in Mark imply a transfer of authority, in which God's phenomenological intervention becomes less central in lieu of Jesus' growing role in God's plan of redemption.** Moving from the baptism, where only God acts, to the transfiguration, and through the crucifixion to the resurrection, Jesus takes an increasingly central role in God's revelatory agenda.



## CHAPTER 2

# Revelatory Acts of God in Matthew

This chapter examines the role of the revelatory acts of God in Matthew for promoting reverence for Jesus among the characters in his Gospel. As revelatory phenomena occur, each related in some way to the figure of Jesus in the narrative, how do these accounts function with respect to the way characters understand Jesus? Specifically, do the revelatory acts of God provoke characters to view Jesus more positively, negatively, or neither? Before specific pericopae in Matthew's Gospel are analyzed, a survey of the religious experiences in general in Matthew is important.

### *Statistical Analysis of Religious Experience in Matthew*

Religious experience<sup>1</sup> is a less prominent category in Matthew than in Mark, relative to the size of each Gospel.<sup>2</sup> Of the 1068 verses in Matthew's Gospel,<sup>3</sup> 214 are found in religious experience accounts.<sup>4</sup> Thus, 20% of Matthew's Gospel is narrative of religious experiences

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<sup>1</sup> The "Introduction" defines religious experience accounts as those in which characters have "some contact with the paranormal." This thesis understands religious experience to be the broader category and "revelatory experience" or "revelatory acts of God" to be a subset of religious experience. Revelatory experiences are accounts in which the divine is disclosed in a visionary or auditory way. See Bockmuehl, *Revelation*, 2.

<sup>2</sup> See the *methodology* section of the "Introduction" for a full explanation of the criteria used for including and excluding pericopae from these statistics.

<sup>3</sup> The 1,068 verse-count comes from a basic tally of verses in E. Nestle, E. Nestle, and K. Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993), not including the following verses, which appear only in some manuscripts: Matt. 17:21; 18:11; 23:14.

<sup>4</sup> Religious experience accounts tallied are: Matt. 1:18–25, Mary conceives and Joseph has first revelatory dream; Matt. 2:1–12, the magi's star and dream; Matt. 2:13–15, Joseph has a second revelatory dream; Matt. 2:19–23, Joseph has third revelatory dream; Matt. 3:13–17, Visionary and auditory phenomena at

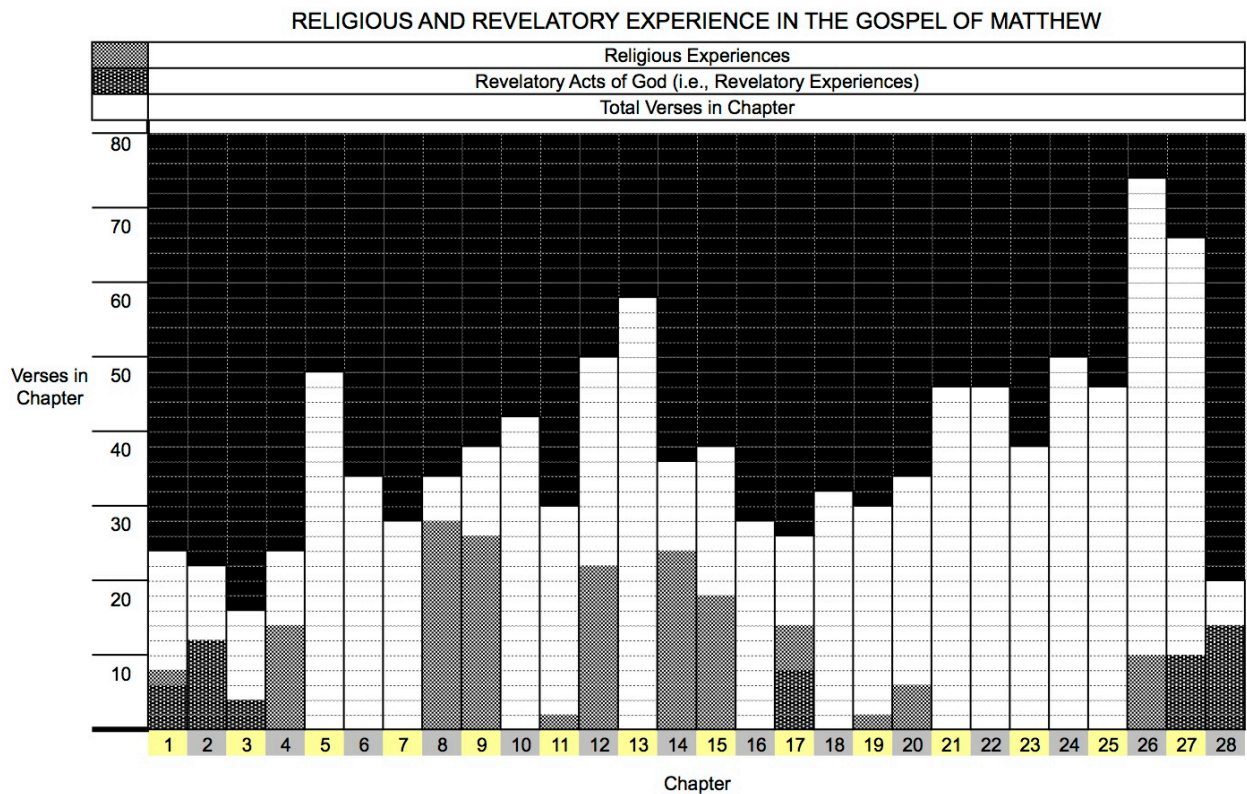
(*light grey* in Figure 1), 31% (66 verses) of which are revelatory acts of God (*dark grey* in Figure 1; the white matter represents the total verses in each chapter).<sup>5</sup> Thus, although religious experience accounts represent a smaller portion of Matthew than Mark, God's revelatory activity comprises a greater percentage of these religious experience accounts. Figure 1 below is a bar graph showing the distribution of religious experiences in general and God's revelatory acts in particular in Matthew's Gospel.

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the baptism of Jesus; Matt. 4:1–11, Satan tempts Jesus; Matt. 4:23–25, Jesus heals sick; Matt. 8:1–4, Jesus heals leper; Matt. 8:5–13, Jesus heals centurion's son; Matt. 8:14–15, Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law; Matt. 8:16–17, Jesus heals sick and exorcizes demons; Matt. 8:23–27, Jesus calms storm; Matt. 8:28–34, Jesus exorcizes Legion; Matt. 9:1–8, Jesus heals paralytic; Matt. 9:18–19, 23–26, Jesus raises little girl; Matt. 9:20–22, Jesus heals woman with 12-year hemorrhage; Matt. 9:27–31, Jesus heals blind; Matt. 9:32–34, Jesus exorcizes mute demon; Matt. 9:35, Jesus heals diseased; Matt. 12:9–14, Jesus heals man with withered hand; Matt. 12:15–21, Jesus heals many; Matt. 12:22–30, Jesus heals and exorcizes; Matt. 14:13–14, Jesus heals crowd; Matt. 14:15–21, Jesus feeds 5,000; Matt. 14:22–33, Jesus walks on the lake; Matt. 14:34–36, crowds touch Jesus for healing; Matt. 15:21–28, Jesus exorcizes Canaanite's daughter; Matt. 15:29–31, Jesus heals crowds; Matt. 15:32–39, Jesus feeds 4,000; Matt. 17:1–9, Jesus is transfigured; Matt. 17:14–18, Jesus exorcizes boy; Matt. 19:1–2, Jesus heals crowd; Matt. 20:29–34, Jesus heals two blind men; Matt. 27:45–54, darkness, veil, earthquake, and resurrection of saints; Matt. 28:1–8, angel appears to women at tomb; Matt. 28:9–10, Jesus appears; Matt. 28:16–20, Jesus appears and commissions disciples.

<sup>5</sup> The first half of Mark's Gospel contains 70% of all religious experiences and only 11% of all revelatory acts of God in the book. Matthew differs from Mark in the distribution of religious experience throughout the Gospel. Matthew distributes religious experiences fairly evenly from start to finish. The first half of Matthew contains 59% of all religious experiences, and the second half 41%.

**Figure 1: Distribution of Religious and Revelatory Experience in Matthew**



God's revelatory acts (dark grey above) are clustered at the beginning and the end of the Gospel, with the sole exception of the transfiguration. That is, 87% of all revelatory accounts in Matthew occur in the first four and the final two chapters, serving as bookends to the Gospel.<sup>6</sup> Matthew's infancy narrative records an angelic announcement of what Jesus will do (Matt. 1:18–25). Then, when Jesus is a mere baby, Matthew adds three more visions in the appearance of the star to the wise men (Matt. 2:9–12), the angel's warning to Joseph to flee to Egypt (Matt. 2:13–15), and another oneiric vision to Joseph that the family is free to return to Israel (Matt. 2:19–23).

<sup>6</sup> Mark's Gospel relies more heavily on *non-revelatory* experiences (healings, exorcisms, etc.), containing only four revelatory accounts throughout the Gospel.

*Revelatory Acts of God within the Structure of Matthew*

On the structure of Matthew, commentators offer summaries of the major viewpoints, yet few have offered a persuasive solution.<sup>7</sup> Brown's recent article promotes the classic 5-discourse structure of Matthew's Gospel and asserts a cross-disciplinary "scholarly consensus" for this view as the first major point of her argument.<sup>8</sup> She then goes on to show how rhetorical techniques used in the five discourses more directly address the reader and therefore must be the structural feature around which the Gospel is structured.

Brown's thesis is questionable, primarily because Brown herself admits that "the same set of techniques is not used in each of the discourses, and . . . the rhetorical devices described are not limited to the discourses."<sup>9</sup> One such technique that Brown uses to show how Matthew is structured around the five discourses is the presence of ambiguity where the audience in the narrative is concerned. She says, "This ambiguity invites the reader to hear the [Sermon on the Mount] as directed to herself."<sup>10</sup> However, the audience is ambiguous at the baptism of Jesus as well, in which Jesus sees the phenomena but the voice is directed to an unnamed crowd. Although this thesis is not objecting to the idea that Matthew wrote the Gospel to be read, still this method of "audience-inference" or rhetorical strategy is an unstable foundation on which to assert the structure of the First Gospel.

Instead, this thesis is inclined to hold loosely any structural analysis of Matthew because the Gospel contains "too large a variety of structural elements" to make any conclusive determination.<sup>11</sup> A judicious path through this "variety of structural elements"

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<sup>7</sup> See Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, 58–72.

<sup>8</sup> J. K. Brown, "Direct Engagement of the Reader in Matthew's Discourses: Rhetorical Techniques and Scholarly Consensus," *NTS* 51 (2005): 19–35.

<sup>9</sup> Brown, "Matthew's Discourses," 34.

<sup>10</sup> Brown, "Matthew's Discourses," 24.

<sup>11</sup> D. A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, vol. 33A, WBC (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 1; R. H. Gundry, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 11. Also, W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *The Gospel According to*

views Matthew’s narrative through the lens of the Synoptic Problem.<sup>12</sup> Since 90% of Mark’s Gospel is reproduced in Matthew—and much of this verbatim—Matthew may have easily adopted Mark’s structure as well.<sup>13</sup> Both Gospels present Jesus’ rejection first in Galilee, then in Jerusalem, and finishing with Jesus’ victorious return to Galilee.

This analysis of revelatory acts of God in Matthew strengthens the geographical structuring of First Gospel. As Figure 1 illustrates, Matthew’s distribution of revelatory experiences is conspicuously similar to Mark’s. Distributed across both Gospels, God’s revelatory acts occur at the beginning, middle, and end.<sup>14</sup> The beginning-middle-end pattern quite naturally follows the geographical movement of the Gospel. Jesus is glorified as “God’s Son” at the baptism in Galilee (Matt. 3:16–17), then on the journey southward to Jerusalem at the transfiguration (Matt. 17:1–8), in Jerusalem during the crucifixion (Matt. 27:45–54), and is finally vindicated as the resurrected son back in Galilee (Matt. 28:1–20).

Thus, in each geographical setting, God testifies about Jesus or his predicament through dreams, voices, or visions. However, it is questionable how fully Jesus’ followers understand what God discloses in these revelatory acts. The results are mixed, with some revelatory experiences successfully delivering the message and in contrast to other experiences. However, Matthew’s Gospel funnels the plot southward, making this journey an overriding concern of his narrative as Jesus’ life and ministry culminate in Jerusalem. As the plot points the reader to Matthew 27–28, where Jesus himself eclipses God’s acts (so Matthew 27) and is God’s revelatory act (so Matthew 28)—Matthew’s structure may hint at the purpose of these

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*Saint Matthew*, vol. 1, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 58–72; R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1989), 141–53, contain extended discussions of the structure of Matthew.

<sup>12</sup> C. A. Evans, *Matthew*, NCBC (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), 9; Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, xlvii; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 2–5.

<sup>13</sup> France, *Matthew*, 2–5; Evans, *Matthew*, 9; Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, xlvii.

<sup>14</sup> Matthew’s concentration of RevEs at the beginning of his Gospel is a notable difference between the two.

revelatory acts of God to begin with—to establish the crucified and resurrected Jesus as God’s revealed presence for the future of his people.

## Revelatory Acts of God in Matthew

The sections below will analyze the (1) content of information delivered in each revelatory act, (2) the response of the witnesses in the narrative, and (3) explore the possible contribution of the subsequent context to Matthew’s depiction of this revelatory event. This analysis of the revelatory acts of God in Matthew will determine the relationship between these events and the way characters in Matthew understand and reverence Jesus. The first section below will examine the revelatory events of Matthew 1–2, followed by a section dedicated to Jesus’ baptism by John (Matt. 3:16–17). Then, the transfiguration will be addressed (Matt. 17:1–8) followed by the miraculous phenomena at the crucifixion (Matt. 27:45–54). The final section of this chapter will analyze the revelatory experiences of the resurrection event (Matt. 28:1–20).

## Revelatory Dreams of Angels (Matthew 1–2)

Dreams are the medium of nearly every revelatory experience of Matthew 1–2.<sup>15</sup> Much scholarly attention has recently been given to dreams in antiquity.<sup>16</sup> But Matthew’s dream

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<sup>15</sup> The appearance of the star to the magi is the only revelatory phenomenon of these early chapters that does not occur in a dream, though the account ends as the magi are warned in a dream not to return to Herod (Matt. 2:12). Although Matthew 1–2 show a preference for dreams against the rest of the Gospel, Matt. 27:19 is another Matthean text in which a dream is mentioned. This passage only references the unsettled dream of Pilate’s wife in regard to Jesus. Because the dream itself is only mentioned but the experience is not described, this reference is not included in the current analysis of revelatory experience in Matthew.

<sup>16</sup> F. Flannery-Dailey, *Dreamers, Scribes, and Priests: Jewish Dreams in the Hellenistic and Roman Eras*, vol. 90, SJSJ (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 1, notes the previous reluctance of scholars to research dreams:

accounts are idiosyncratic among most other revelatory encounters in the canonical Gospels.<sup>17</sup> In Miller's words, the content of most revelatory experiences in the Gospels establishes "expectations that are not fulfilled in the larger narrative."<sup>18</sup> Matthew's dreams, on the other hand, occur for a specific purpose in the narrative context, to provide deliverance to the characters that witness them.<sup>19</sup>

### *Content of the Dreams of Angels*

#### **1. Angels Appear to Save the Day (Matthew 1:20; 2:13; 2:19)**

Each revelatory experience of the Matthean dream sequence begins with a problem that an angel comes to resolve.<sup>20</sup> That is, each dream offers resolution to a problem in the story, and this resolution is the main purpose of the dream revelatory experiences. In this way, Matthew's infancy narrative differs from revelatory experiences later in the Gospel as

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"whereas we tend to view dreams as unreal, interior, subjective phenomena, ancient peoples believed that some dreams were genuine visits from deities or their divine representatives." Flannery's qualification that "some" dreams were divine visits is appropriately nuanced. J. B. F. Miller, *"Convinced That God Has Calls Us": Dreams, Visions, and the Perception of God's Will in Luke-Acts*, vol. 85, BIS (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 237–38, warns against the perspective that, "dream-visions were viewed unequivocally as divine revelation in the ancient world.... Ancient texts featuring dream-visions must be evaluated on an individual basis ... [because] ancients often viewed dream visions with uncertainty."

<sup>17</sup> D. S. Dodson, *Reading Dreams: An Audience-Critical Approach to the Dreams in the Gospel of Matthew*, vol. 397, LNTS (London: T & T Clark, 2009), is the most recent study on Matthean dreams and provides a useful appraisal of dreams in Matthew's Gospel. Dodson's work adopts Hanson's form critical approach when highlighting the similarities in Greco-Roman and Matthean dream accounts (139). Cf. J. S. Hanson, *Dreams and Visions in the Graeco-Roman World and Early Christianity*, vol. 23.2.1395–1427, ANRW (New York: De Gruyter, 1980).

<sup>18</sup> J. B. F. Miller, "Dreams/Visions and the Experience of God in Luke-Acts," in *Experientia, Volume 1: Inquiry Into Religious Experience in Early Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. F. Flannery, Colleen Shantz, and Rodney Werline, Symposium Series (Atlanta: SBL, 2008), 239.

<sup>19</sup> Dodson, *Dreams*, 134, says dream-accounts have a "conventional form" in Greco-Roman literature and on this basis explains "their specific contribution to Matthew's narrative of Jesus." Unfortunately, Dodson's monograph does not engage with the then-most-recent work in the field, Flannery's *Dreamers, Scribes and Priests* (2004). Flannery observes that the dream accounts of Matthew 1–2 "did not develop in a vacuum" but are part of a larger context in which dreams are a means for divine revelation. F. Flannery-Dailey, "Standing At the Head of Dreamers: A Study of Dreams in Antiquity" (University of Iowa, 2000), 14. That is, dream-revelations carried as much weight for ancients as conscious visionary revelatory experiences. Thus, Matthew's penchant for dreams simply reinforces that he was writing at a time in which dreams were understood to bear divine communications.

<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of the role of "intermediary figures," see Bauckham, "Throne," 48–51.

direction for characters in the plot is the primary purpose of these events not the disclosure of christological information. Matthew signals this with a resumptive clause during each account, stating the context in which the dream takes place (Matt. 1:20, “as he was considering this . . .”; 2:13, “when they had gone away . . .”; 2:19, “When Herod died . . .”).<sup>21</sup> Each of these angelic dream appearances provides direction to avert danger. One might say that Matthew’s angels offer temporal “salvation” to the recipients of these revelatory dreams.<sup>22</sup> Problems prompt all the Matthean dream revelations as angels offer a way of deliverance to the characters concerned.

Matthew 1:18–25 recounts the problem of Mary’s pregnancy, with implied reference to the command in Deut. 22:23–24. Joseph, assuming Mary’s guilt in the matter, wants to dismiss her quietly. The angel appears to resolve Joseph’s quandary and reveal Mary’s innocence and the origin and mission of the child. Thus, this first dream does disclose the importance of the child that Mary bears and the deliverance God will bring through him.<sup>23</sup>

Matthew 2:1–12 recounts the interaction of the magi with Herod. Verse 12 ends the pericope with a brief comment about deliverance afforded the magi in a dream. Matthew does not mention the appearance of an angel in this dream. As with Joseph’s dreams, the magi’s dream averts disaster, without providing any christological content.

Matthew 2:13–15 and 19–23 record the final angelic dreams of the first two chapters. In the former, Joseph is warned in a dream by an angel to flee to Egypt. In the latter, the angel tells Joseph it is safe to return to the land of Israel. Again, the message of the angel in

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<sup>21</sup> R. E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1977), 108.

<sup>22</sup> Matthew also takes little interest in any physical description of these angelic beings. Matthew includes no definite article in three out of four mentions of an angel of the Lord, perhaps implying that the heavenly status of Matthew’s angels is not important in the Gospel as in Luke.

<sup>23</sup> D. D. Kupp, *Matthew’s Emmanuel: Divine Presence and God’s People in the First Gospel*, SNTSMS 90 (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1996), 59.



these dreams mainly provides instruction to flee to and from Egypt rather than contributing specifically to the christological framework of the Gospel.

Thus, the angels in Matthew primarily offer messages of deliverance. However, Matthew also juxtaposes the deliverance given by these angels with the more significant offer of salvation for Jesus’ “people” from sin (Matt. 1:21, αὐτὸς γὰρ σώσει τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν). The angel alleviates the temporal crisis, but, as Kupp explains, Jesus will alleviate the crisis among his people caused by sin.<sup>24</sup>

## **2. God’s Presence in Angelic Pronouncements (Matthew 1:18–25; 2:1–12, 13–15, 19–23)**

Characteristics of Matthew’s dream accounts indicate that the Gospel has a particular interest in emphasizing God’s presence with his people, but by the angels’ appearances and also by the coming of Jesus. First, the command-rationale formula appears in all four dreams in Matthew 1–2 and indicates God’s involvement in directing his people (1:18–25; 2:1–12, 13–15, 19–23). Matthew 1:20 commands Joseph not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife because Jesus is conceived by the Spirit and will meet his people’s need for a deliverer. Matthew 2:12–13 says that a dream warns (χρηματισθέντες) the magi to avoid Herod on their return from Bethlehem, which contains in this warning both the command to divert and the implication that danger will thus be avoided. Matthew 2:13 and 20 command the flight to and from Egypt with the reasons being the rampage and death of Herod. In each of the above instances, God’s involvement as he provides needed direction through the angels is an underlying theme. In Kupp’s words, these crises have led to a “blindness to divine presence” that the angelic appearances partially relieve.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Kupp, *Emmanuel*, 59.

<sup>25</sup> Kupp, *Emmanuel*, 59.

Second, angels appear four times in Matthew 1–2 and every occurrence includes the genitive modifier κυρίου (Matt. 1:20, 24; 2:13, 19). Also in three out of four of these citations, Matthew does not use a definite article, implying that the identity of the angel is not nearly as important as its origin. Thus, Matthew’s emphasis is not the identity but the origin of the angels that appear in these dreams. That is, the angels are God’s emissaries, sent by him to be God’s presence with his people.<sup>26</sup>

Third, the angel’s rationale especially in the first dream (Matt. 1:18–25) indicates Matthew’s interest in showing that God *will remain* with his people. The angel describes Jesus as Ἐμμανουήλ . . . μεθ’ ἡμῶν ὁ θεός (Matt. 1:23; 28:18–20). By describing Jesus this way, God is assuring Joseph that God’s presence will remain with his people and that Mary’s pregnancy is instrumental in that process.

Fourth, the use of Israel’s scripture by the angel and then the narrator further reinforces Matthew’s emphasis on God’s presence with his people, as Jesus’ coming fulfills promises that have been made to Israel in the prophets. Notwithstanding the fact that scripture citations are a trademark of Matthean narrative, these citations emphasize the future fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel.<sup>27</sup> Particularly the Matt. 1:23 quotation, being the only citation on the lips of the angel, underscores how both the angel’s appearance and Jesus’ coming are acts of God on behalf of his people.

### 3. The Rising of Jesus’ Star (Matthew 2:1–12)

Matthew 2:1–12 says that the μάγοι see a star rise and respond with a journey to Jerusalem.<sup>28</sup> Matthew does not recount the event itself but only mentions the appearance of the star during

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<sup>26</sup> Kupp, *Emmanuel*, 54.

<sup>27</sup> R. E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 48.

<sup>28</sup> See B. Landau, *The Revelation of the Magi* (New York: HarperOne, 2005).

the magi’s discussion with Herod (Matt. 2:2, εἶδομεν γὰρ αὐτοῦ τὸν ἀστέρα ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ . . .).<sup>29</sup>

The first observation from the above statement is the possessive αὐτοῦ used with τὸν ἀστέρα. Scholars have long recognized that such stars as signs of the birth of royalty were commonplace in antiquity, and even Jews similarly believe that these stars would precede the messiah (cf., Num. 24:17–19).<sup>30</sup> Thus, the fact that this astral body is called “his” star means that it is simply the star that represents Jesus’ birth.<sup>31</sup>

Second, the magi see the star ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ, probably best translated “in its rising.”<sup>32</sup> It is only the star’s movement that Matthew describes, stating its upward movement as a sign to the magi before it begins to move and comes to rest over the place where Jesus is (Matt. 2:9, ἐλθὼν ἐστάθη ἐπάνω οὗ ᾧ τὸ παιδίον).<sup>33</sup> As with Matthew’s nondescript angels, the star also appears, does its duty in the narrative, and leaves without proper focus on the star’s luminous appearance. Instead, Matthew’s modest star does not detract from the magi’s journey of reverence for Jesus.

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<sup>29</sup> J. M. Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*, vol. 28, Studies in Biblical Theology (London: SCM, 1974), 124.

<sup>30</sup> W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew*, AB (Garden City: Doubleday, 1971), 14; Gundry, *Matthew*, 26–27; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 233–34; C. A. Evans, *Matthew*, NCBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 52; France, *Matthew*, 68; Brown, *Birth*, 170–71.

<sup>31</sup> Brown, *Birth*, 174. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 27, notes that Jesus is referred to as a rising star in other NT books (Luke 1:78; 2 Pet 1:19; Rev 22:16) and Matthew himself later calls Jesus a “light in darkness” (4:16).

<sup>32</sup> S. J. Gathercole, “The Heavenly ἀνατολή (Luke 1:78–9),” *JTS* 56 (2005): 471–88, discusses at length the use of ἀνατολή in Luke’s Gospel.

<sup>33</sup> I take this phrase as does Evans, *Matthew*, 52 who translates it “in its rising” instead of “in the east.”

## Summary of the Content of the Revelatory Dreams

Different from most other revelatory acts of God in the Synoptics, Matthew's revelatory events at Jesus' birth have a plot-developing role in the narrative.<sup>34</sup> The dream revelations offer temporal deliverance and represent God's persistent presence with his people, while foreshadowing the more significant deliverance and divine presence that will come in Jesus. The appearance and guidance of the magi's star does not provide deliverance, yet this revelatory act of God is the sole event of the birth narrative to produce reverence for Jesus in those who witness it (detailed discussed below). Below, the responses of Joseph and the magi will be addressed to see if these figures respond favorably to these revelatory acts of God.

### *Responses to the Revelatory Acts of God in Matthew 1–2*

The witnesses to the revelatory acts of God in Matthew 1–2 offer a range of reactions. First, although the first dream commands Joseph not to fear, his fear is not of the angel but rather of violating the divorce-commandment with Mary now pregnant (Matt. 1:20). The angel assures Joseph that Mary's pregnancy is the work of God (Matt. 1:22). Beyond this, Matthew does not recount Joseph's response to the dream. The Gospel seems primarily interested in Joseph's obedience to the angelic command and his continued adherence to the law of God.<sup>35</sup> Further revelatory dreams to Joseph in chapter 2 follow the same pattern. Joseph responds positively by quietly obeying everything the angel tells him to do, but no further response is recorded.

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<sup>34</sup> All of the dream RevEs of Matthew 1–2 begin with a resumptive clause, connecting these events to the surrounding context. Matthew 1:20 begins, “as he was considering this, behold ...” and 2:13, 19 have similar introductory statements (Brown, *Birth*, 108. Matthew 2:13, “When they had gone away, behold ...” and 2:19, “When Herod died, behold ...”). Each of these clauses references a change in events within which the angelic dream would then come to provide direction.

<sup>35</sup> Matt. 1:24 and 25, respectively.

The other revelatory audience of Matthew's birth narrative is the magi of Matt. 2:1–12. Matthew describes the response of these men in fuller detail. Twice in these twelve verses does Matthew highlight the intent of the magi to “pay homage” or “worship” (προσκυνέω) Jesus when they find him (2:2, 11).<sup>36</sup> Hurtado contends that Matthew's use of προσκυνέω is honorific in contexts where Jesus is present.<sup>37</sup> However, when taking all of Matthew's uses of the term into consideration, προσκυνέω is ambiguous, with half of Matthew's uses referring to typical gestures of respect and half referring to religious reverence.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, Hagner and Evans both appeal to the royal context when concluding that that προσκυνέω probably connotes *homage* in Matt. 2:2, 8, 11.<sup>39</sup> The magi use βασιλεύς to describe Jesus in Matt. 2:2, and King Herod's massacre suggests that Jesus poses a threat to his throne. The context indeed seems to favor the magi's προσκυνέω being royal rather than cultic, as Hagner and Evans conclude. Thus, Matthew portrays both Joseph and the magi as responding to the revelatory messages given them.

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<sup>36</sup> I do not include the reference in 2:8, where Herod says, ὅπως κἀγὼ ἐλθὼν προσκυνήσω αὐτῷ.

<sup>37</sup> L. W. Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 142–45.

<sup>38</sup> Other than Matt. 2:2, 8, 11, Matthew also uses προσκυνέω in the following contexts: 4:9, in which Satan commands Jesus' devotion and Jesus responds with Deut 6:13, that such devotion is reserved for God alone; 8:2, 9:18 15:25, 18:26, and 20:20 are all gestures of respect. And 14:33, 28:9, 17 are references to cultic devotion. One observation may distinguish Matthew's use of προσκυνέω in 2:11 as an act of devotion rather than regal homage. When Matthew uses προσκυνέω to depict homage, he usually has the active character make a qualifying statement that removes cultic devotion from a possible meaning in context. Matthew 8:2, for example, records that the leper “pays homage, saying, ‘Lord, if you are willing you can make me clean.’” The leper is simply petitioning Jesus' to be healed. Cultic devotion is not in view. Similarly, 9:18 15:25, 18:26, and 20:20 all make qualifying statements or requests to Jesus after the verb προσκυνέω is used.

By contrast, none of the texts that clearly depict cultic devotion issue the same statements. Instead, simply say that characters “worship.” Matthew 4:9 tells about Satan's temptation of Jesus when he tells Jesus that Satan will give him all that he sees “if falling down you worship me.” Satan is not exhorting Jesus to pay him homage, but wants Jesus' cultic loyalty in exchange for the world. Similarly, Jesus' followers worship him during the resurrection appearances in 28:9, 17.

<sup>39</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 27; Evans, *Matthew*, 53.

### *Subsequent Context*

None of the witnesses of the revelatory acts of God in Matthew's birth narrative appear again in the narrative of the Gospel.<sup>40</sup> Neither Joseph, nor the magi, nor the revelatory phenomena they witness are mentioned again by any character or used to testify in any way to the importance of Jesus in the Gospel. This observation indicates that the revelatory acts of God early in Matthew's Gospel are themselves not used as a proof or to authenticate the witness' status with God. These acts occur as isolated events in which God testifies in that context to his presence and the deliverance he promises to bring.

### *Conclusion to the Revelatory Dreams of Angels*

The content of the revelatory experiences of Matthew 1–2 illustrates God's temporal presence and intervention yet emphasizes his future presence and intervention in the person of Jesus. In the birth of Jesus came salvation from sin (Matt. 1:21) and the fulfillment of God's promises to deliver Israel through a messiah (Matt. 2:6). These revelatory acts of God do produce a positive response of obedience in Joseph and homage in the magi. Although these revelatory acts of God do not necessarily promote responses that reflect the content they bear, they do promote positive responses in general and therefore are considered effective in promoting reverence for Jesus in the characters who witness them.

## Revelatory Acts of God at the Baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:16–17)

Matthew's baptism account changes the perspective of the event from second person to third person, seemingly assuming an audience of observers (Matt. 3:17). Nevertheless, Matthew's

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<sup>40</sup> Joseph is mentioned once when characters remember the members of Jesus' family (Matt 13:55), but he does not appear as an actor in the story after Matt 2:19.

account describes only Jesus’ awareness of the event. As will be demonstrated below, this revelatory experience does not serve the characters in Matthew’s narrative by establishing in witnesses conviction about Jesus or what he has come to do. The paragraphs below will show this by examining (1) the revelatory content of the baptism phenomena, (2) the response of the witness, and (3) the subsequent context in which the passage is set.

### *Content of Matthew’s Baptism Account*

#### **1. The Opened Heavens as a Display of Divine Intervention (Matthew 3:16)**

Matthew’s opening of heaven seems to be a reference to Isa. 63:19, which calls for God to open the heavens and intervene on earth (ἐὰν ἀνοίξης τὸν οὐρανόν, τρόμος λήμψεται ἀπὸ σοῦ ὅρη, καὶ τακήσονται). So, as Matthew recounts that the heavens “open” (Matt. 3:16, ἡνεώχθησαν) rather than “tear” (Mark 1:10, σχιζομένου),<sup>41</sup> he foreshadows God’s visiting earth and executing of his will in Jesus. Some commentators also observe that Matthew’s version of the event closely parallels Ezek. 1:1, where Ezekiel has the heavens open to him as he sees visions of God.<sup>42</sup> Davies and Allison note the distinction between Isa. 63:19 and Ezek. 1:1, the former being an instance in which God comes down to earth and the latter one in which Ezekiel peers up into heaven.<sup>43</sup> This distinction links Matthew’s baptism more closely with Isa. 63:19, because the visionary content of Matthew’s baptism shows God

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<sup>41</sup> Davies and Allison helpfully distinguish between two kinds of heavenly schism: the first type of revelation opens heaven to allow the seer to ascend and enter the firmament. The second type of revelation, which also characterizes Matthew’s baptism account, has the “heavenly world above drawing back its ‘curtain’ or ‘garment’ (cf. Job 14:12; Ps 104:2; Isa. 40:22; *b. Mes.* 59a) to allow a person in the earthly world below to see secrets. Jesus, therefore, is having God’s abode opened to him so the Spirit may descend and the heavens may be revealed” (Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, 329).

<sup>42</sup> These contend that the grammatical and syntactical changes made by Matthew conform the passage to Ezek. 1:1. See Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, 329; E. Schweizer, *The Good News according to Matthew* (London: SPCK, 1975), 53; E. Schweizer, *Jesus, the Parable of God* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1974), 53.

<sup>43</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, 329.

descending to Jesus rather than Jesus ascending to heaven. “The opening of heaven is the prelude to the divine communication which follows and especially to the visible descent of the Spirit.”<sup>44</sup> The heavens are opened showing that God has sent Jesus to intervene on his behalf and do his will in the rest of the Gospel.<sup>45</sup>

## 2. The Presence of God’s Spirit (Matthew 3:16)

Matthew’s anarthrous construction “God’s Spirit” (Matt. 3:16, πνεῦμα θεοῦ) stresses the divine presence with Jesus in his obedience to the Father. However, Matt. 3:16 contains variants to the phrase that may influence this reading. The verse reads [τὸ] πνεῦμα [τοῦ] θεοῦ (cf. Mark 1:10, τὸ πνεῦμα).<sup>46</sup> Although the NA28 contains no variant related to θεοῦ, several witnesses add definite articles to πνεῦμα and θεοῦ, forming τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ.<sup>47</sup> Although a majority of later manuscripts include the articles (e.g., C, D<sup>s</sup>, L, and W), Codex Sinaiticus (Ⲱ) and Vaticanus (B) attest to a non-articular reading. Inference alone can decide between the two readings, but it is easier to understand why a scribe would have added the articles rather than omitted them. Furthermore, Matt. 3:16 shows other signs of later redaction that

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<sup>44</sup> France, *Matthew*, 121; C. S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 132, adds that seeing the parting of the heavens as a sign of God’s future deliverance in Jesus, which seems to be less explicit in the text.

<sup>45</sup> See also J. J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 91, who cites *Testament of Judah* 24:2 (“And the heavens shall be opened unto him, to pour out the Spirit, (even) the blessing of the Holy Father”) as clearly allusive to the Synoptic baptism tradition. However, L. E. Keck, “The Spirit and the Dove,” *NTS* 17 (1970), 59, believes this text to be a Christian interpolation.

<sup>46</sup> Mark’s Gospel includes the definite article (τὸ πνεῦμα), so it would be incorrect to say that Matthew is adding “definiteness” to the Spirit with the addition of θεοῦ. Matthew 12:28 is a passage original to Matthew in which he also includes θεοῦ to qualify πνεῦμα, and thus it seems that the divine origin of the Spirit may be of particular concern in Matthew’s Gospel.

<sup>47</sup> E. Nestle et al., eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012).



indicate this verse may have been particularly mutable in the history of its transmission.<sup>48</sup>

Therefore, this author is inclined toward the non-articular reading.<sup>49</sup>

Consequently, Harner’s reflections on the qualitative significance of anarthrous predicate nouns are applicable.<sup>50</sup> Harner believes anarthrous predicate nouns emphasize the *quality* of the noun rather than its definiteness.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, “divine Spirit” is Matthew’s sense rather than “*the* Spirit of God.” If “divine spirit” is Matthew’s sense, God’s aura or presence with Jesus is the focus of the baptism, rather than Spirit-empowerment or Spirit-compulsion.<sup>52</sup> Whereas Jesus is “driven” (ἐκβάλλω) by the Spirit into the desert in Mark’s Gospel, Matthew emphasizes the divine “spirit” with Jesus for faithful service to the Father.

A Matthean emphasis on the divine presence in and with Jesus is corroborated in other texts as well. Matthew 1:20–25 recounts Joseph’s revelatory dream in which an angel describes Jesus as “God with us” (Matt. 1:23, μεθ’ ἡμῶν ὁ θεός).<sup>53</sup> Such angelic pronouncement makes Matthew’s addition of θεοῦ at the baptism more significant. Because *God’s* Spirit descends upon Jesus at the baptism, “God with us” is clarified—Jesus is the Son of God and the presence of God is on him as he ministers to his people. Furthermore, as God’s Spirit is with Jesus in his ministry, so will the presence of Jesus, “God with us,” accompany his followers as they are called to minister in his name at the end of the Gospel.

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<sup>48</sup> The second significant textual variant in Matt. 3:16 will be explored in the audience section to follow.

<sup>49</sup> Matthew’s non-articular form of πνεῦμα θεοῦ also occurs in one other place in the Gospel, a passage in which Jesus is responding to charges of the Pharisees that he exorcizes demons by the Beelzeboul (12:28). Jesus replies, εἰ δὲ ἐν πνεύματι θεοῦ ἐγὼ ἐκβάλλω τὰ δαιμόνια, ἄρα ἔφθασεν ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ. Jesus’ reply may indicate that the πνεῦμα θεοῦ construction is primarily a statement of God’s presence or power (ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ).

<sup>50</sup> See my earlier discussion applying Harner to Mark 15:39.

<sup>51</sup> P. B. Harner, “Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns,” *JBL* 92 (1973), 81.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Isa. 42:1, Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 57, emphasizes commissioning. See the previous chapter on Mark’s Gospel for the full discussion.

<sup>53</sup> Other texts citing Jesus’ importance: Matt. 1:16; 2:6, 11.

### 3. God's Faithful Son (Matthew 3:17)

God's declaration of Jesus' divine and beloved sonship establishes the favor and status Jesus enjoys in God's kingdom and work. Thus, God's christological affirmation at the baptism is the culmination of all such experiences in Matthew 1–4 because the baptism is the only unmediated revelatory event in which God himself speaks on Jesus' behalf.<sup>54</sup> The angel's revelation to Joseph in a dream (Matt. 1:19–25), the appearance of the star to the μάγοι (Matt. 2:9–12), the angel's warning to go down to Egypt (Matt. 2:13–15), and the angelic revelation that the family is free to return to Israel (Matt. 2:19–23) are all mediated by agents of God. At the Jordan, however, God himself superintends the baptism, making the baptismal revelation one of utmost importance in the Gospel.

Matthew 3:17 uses the demonstrative particle, “behold” (ἰδοῦ), to introduce the voice from heaven (καὶ ἰδοὺ φωνὴ ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν λέγουσα ...). BDAG sees this particle as introducing “something new ... also something quite extraordinary” in the narrative.<sup>55</sup> That is, ἰδοῦ calls the reader to pay particular attention to the heavenly pronouncement.<sup>56</sup> Davies and Allison agree that the voice “is the culmination and highlight of 3.1–17.”<sup>57</sup> Therefore, what the voice communicates can be understood as interpreting the signs that have gone before in the baptism. As mentioned in the earlier chapter on Mark's Gospel, Bockmuehl has observed the tendency of texts in Israel's scripture and New Testament to offer interpretations to revelatory phenomena after they occur. He observes that in most cases, “the

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<sup>54</sup> France, *Matthew*, 124.

<sup>55</sup> F. W. Danker *et al.*, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1996), 468.

<sup>56</sup> A number of commentators wonder whether the rabbinic *bat qôl* may be referenced by Matthew (so, M. McNamara, *Targum and Testament Revisited* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010], 173–74). See Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 335–36 for the strongest reasons against seeing the *bat qôl* in Matt. 3:17.

<sup>57</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 335 also cite 1 Kings 19:13; Matt. 17:5; Rev 4:1; 1 En. 13:8; 4 Ezra 14:38; 2 Bar 13:1; 4 Bar 9:12 as instances in which “behold” ushers in a heavenly voice.

new revelation involves interpretation, whether of visions, dreams, or Scripture.”<sup>58</sup>

Therefore, the voice is introduced at the end of the visionary experience to interpret for the disciples and the reader the meaning of the visionary phenomena. The opening of the heavens and the descent of the dove are both to be seen as divine signs highlighting Jesus’ status as the beloved Son of God.<sup>59</sup>

Matthew’s heavenly voice speaks in the third-person (“this is” instead of Mark’s “you are”).<sup>60</sup> The change in perspective by the heavenly voice illustrates for whom the declaration is intended. Whereas Mark’s Gospel is only beginning its account of Jesus when he is baptized and the voice speaks in the second person, Matthew has already recognized Jesus as “God with us” who will “save the people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21, 23; 2:15). The heavenly voice builds on these earlier statements of chapter 1–2 by now having God himself re-announce Jesus’ divine sonship (cf. Matt. 2:15). France’s comments on the baptismal voice are judicious; “God is not quoting the OT, nor setting a puzzle for scripturally erudite hearers to unravel. He is declaring in richly allusive words that this man who has just been baptized by John is his own Son in whom he delights . . . however long it may take the actors in the story to reach the same Christological conclusion.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Bockmuehl, *Revelation*, 30.

<sup>59</sup> Matthew’s Gospel calls Jesus “God’s Son” nineteen times: 2:15, Hos 1:11: ἐξ Αἰγύπτου ἐκάλεσα τὸν υἱόν μου; 3:17, God: οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός; 4:3, Satan: εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ; 4:6, Satan: εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ; 8:29, demoniac: υἱὲ τοῦ θεοῦ; 11:27 (x2), self-reference: καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐπιγινώσκει τὸν υἱὸν εἰ μὴ ὁ πατήρ . . . ὁ υἱός; 14:33, disciples after he calms storm: ἀληθῶς θεοῦ υἱὸς εἶ; 16:16, Peter: σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος; Matt. 17:15, God: οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός; 21:37–38 (x3), self-reference in the Parable of the Tenants: τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ . . . τὸν υἱόν μου . . . ἰδόντες τὸν υἱόν; Matt. 24:36, self-reference: οὐδὲ οἱ ἄγγελοι τῶν οὐρανῶν οὐδὲ ὁ υἱός, εἰ μὴ ὁ πατήρ μόνος; 26:63, high priest: ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ; 27:40, crowd: εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ; 27:43, crowd: εἶπεν γὰρ ὅτι θεοῦ εἰμι υἱός; 27:54, soldiers: ἀληθῶς θεοῦ υἱὸς ἦν οὗτος; 28:19, self-reference: εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος.

<sup>60</sup> Σὺ εἰ is supported by D05 A, Syrus Sinaiticus, Syrus Curetonianus, and quotations in Irenaeus.

Matthew’s preference for the third person is also addressed in *Jesus’ Response* below.

<sup>61</sup> France, *Matthew*, 124.

### Summary of the Content of Jesus' Baptismal Revelatory Experience

God's revelatory act at the baptism has certain variations from Mark that show the First Gospel's particular christological emphasis. Matthew's heavens do not "tear" apart, but rather "open," illustrating God's intervention through his faithful servant. Matthew also uses God's Spirit as a sign of divine presence with Jesus for the tasks of his future ministry. Jesus launches into this future ministry possessing the Father's favor and status as his "beloved Son." The next section will discuss whether or not Matthew records Jesus' response to these events.

### *Jesus' Response*

Matthew's baptism account lacks an explicit audience, although John is implied by the third-person address. As Luz remarks, "The 'titular formula' in the second person has become an 'identification formula' in the third person."<sup>62</sup> Therefore, God's voice in Matthew identifies Jesus to the Baptist.

But the baptism account only mentions Jesus' perception of the phenomena. The Evangelist's placement of εἶδεν ("he saw") in the second position is another change that seems to make the event slightly less about Jesus' apprehension of the phenomena than Mark's (Matt. 3:17, καὶ ἰδοὺ ἠνεώχθησαν [αὐτῷ] οἱ οὐρανοί, καὶ εἶδεν [τὸ] πνεῦμα [τοῦ] θεοῦ καταβαῖνον; Mark 1:10, εἶδεν σχιζομένους τοὺς οὐρανοὺς καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα ὡς περιστερὰν καταβαῖνον εἰς αὐτόν). This move on Matthew's part makes the opening of the heavens less a vision of Jesus and more broadly accessible to an unstated audience, because the voice from heaven speaks to others about Jesus, not to Jesus himself.<sup>63</sup> This is significant because it

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<sup>62</sup> U. Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, vol. 1, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2007), 143.

<sup>63</sup> Lentzen-Deis, "Das Motive der Himmelsöffnung" in verschiedenen Gattungen der Umweltliteratur des

equivocates on the witnesses to Matthew’s baptism account. Jesus is a certain witness, but the text is unclear about the object of the voice’s declaration.

The Matthean baptismal revelatory experience also contains a textual variant in Matt. 3:16 relevant to the current project, which adds αὐτῷ (“behold, the heavens were opened *to him* ...”). Codex Sinaiticus (Ⲱ), Codex Vaticanus (B) and a number of other manuscripts or sources have readings without αὐτῷ.<sup>64</sup> Later revisions of Sinaiticus and other manuscripts<sup>65</sup> include αὐτῷ. Although Metzger sees the shorter reading as the strongest, he also finds it plausible that early copyists, “not understanding the force of αὐτῷ, omitted the word as unnecessary.”<sup>66</sup>

The inclusion or omission of αὐτῷ is important given this project’s focus on the subjective experiences that characters have of the revelatory acts of God in Matthew. If αὐτῷ is the initial reading and later copyists removed this word, text critics could assume that the redactor was concerned that this revelation in Matt. 3:16–17 be universally accessible to Matthew’s unspoken audience. On the other hand, if the shorter version was the initial reading and later scribes added αὐτῷ, this indicates that scribes preferred the emphasis Mark places on Jesus’ comprehension, wanting to make sure that the audience understood Jesus to have personally seen the heavens open.

Two observations by Davies and Allison persuasively argue for the shorter reading. Matthew 3:17 contains a similar variant that was not included because of overwhelmingly weak attestation in the manuscripts. D05 is the primary witness that adds πρὸς αὐτόν to 3:17

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Neuen Testaments,” *Biblica* 50 (1969): 327, comments that Matthew’s use of imagery in the baptism distances the event from the purely visionary and establishes it as “true revelation” for the reader. See also Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, 330, and my discussion on this in the *Introduction* to this chapter.

<sup>64</sup> Syrus Sinaiticus and Syrus Curetonianus, Byzantine lectionaries, individual Vulgate manuscripts, Sahidic manuscripts, and quotations from the works of Irenaeus and Cyril of Jerusalem all omit αὐτῷ.

<sup>65</sup> Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus, D<sup>s</sup>, L, and W include αὐτῷ.

<sup>66</sup> B. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 11.

(“And behold a voice from heaven said *to him* ...”). The manuscript evidence for the shorter reading of 3:17 is indisputable. Davies and Allison see the variant in 3:17—which seems to want to focus the text more on Jesus’ knowledge of the revelatory event as αὐτῷ does in 3:16—as weakening the longer reading in Matt. 3:16.<sup>67</sup> That is, the variants in both verses reflect a tendency in these scribes to individualize this revelatory account and are most likely later additions to the text.

Davies and Allison also notice how early Christian communities were uncomfortable with the disparity between Matthew’s and Mark’s accounts. Some early believers seemed to feel the tension between each author’s record of the event and historical questions about whether a voice spoke to Jesus (so Mark) or to an audience (so Matthew). “Tension was felt to exist between Matt. 3.16–17 and Mark 1.10–11 and that attempts were made to establish harmony is demonstrated by *Gosp. Eb. frag. 4*, where the heavenly voice first speaks to Jesus alone in the words of Mark 1.11 and then again to John in the words of 3.17.”<sup>68</sup> Given the problems some early Christians had in harmonizing these accounts, it seems more likely that scribes from these communities added words to Matthew’s account to help it better conform to the Markan version. Thus, the Matthean account seems to turn the baptismal voice “outward” by using the third person, but Jesus does see the descending Spirit albeit without an immediate response to the vision.

### *Subsequent Context*

Jesus’ baptism is alluded to during his temptation in the desert in Matt. 4:1–11, in which Satan challenges Jesus twice to regarding his divine sonship. God’s declaration of Jesus’

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<sup>67</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, 328 n. 67.

<sup>68</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, 328 n. 67.

sonship and Satan's temptation are connected literarily, where "the identification of Jesus as the beloved "Son" of God (Matt 3:17) sets the stage for the Satanic wilderness temptation" where Jesus' sonship is mentioned.<sup>69</sup> First, Matthew's voice at the baptism is in the third person, not the second person as in Mark, and therefore Jesus' awareness of and participation in the baptism revelation gives his tacit approval of what the voice says. Thus, the voice does not so much inform Jesus as *affirm* him of his status as before God.

Second, if Jesus already knows that he is God's Son when being led into the desert to be tempted, Satan's temptation is not that Jesus *prove* but rather *misuse* his status and favor as God's Son. Evans recognizes as much when saying, "The temptations do not directly challenge the divine sonship of Jesus; rather, they attempt to misdirect it and, if successful, render it powerless and ineffective. The mission of Jesus is to 'save his people from their sins' (Matt 1:21). If he cannot save himself from the temptations of Satan, he cannot save his people."<sup>70</sup>

In this way, the temptation event is a barometer of how effective the baptism phenomena were at helping Jesus to understand how his sonship is to be employed during his ministry, in service of God and his redemptive agenda. Although Jesus' reaction to the baptism phenomena is not recorded at the event itself, Jesus' responses to Satan's temptations indicate that he himself is convicted of the proper way to act as God's Son, not as one who does Satan's bidding, but as one in whom the Father is well pleased.

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<sup>69</sup> Evans, *Matthew*, 80.

<sup>70</sup> Evans, *Matthew*, 80. Hagner, *Matthew 1–14*, 67, implies as much when he depicts Satan's temptation as challenging Jesus to "capitalize on his identity as the Son of God."

### *Conclusion to the Baptism Revelatory Experience*

Although John the Baptist is the implied audience of the voice's third person address, only Jesus "sees" the descent of the Spirit. The text does not mention whether or not Jesus sees the opening of the heavens or hears the voice, although Matthew is explicit that Jesus sees the dove descend. Nevertheless, his perception of the dove implies his reception of the phenomena and their message about him.

The content revealed in the baptismal phenomena is reiterated in the ensuing temptation narrative, in which Satan challenges Jesus to misuse his position as God's Son. Jesus shows a certain confidence about the way his sonship is to be employed and therefore rebuffs Satan's temptation. In this way, God's revelatory acts at the baptism are effective for producing conviction in Jesus himself, albeit not in any characters apart from him. Apparently, reverence for Jesus at this point in the narrative is not a concern for Matthew, who seems content that this revelatory episode occurs without a crowd to "experience" it.

### **Jesus' Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1–8)**

The transfiguration of Jesus in Matthew includes Peter, James, and John as witnesses to the phenomena. The event also includes visionary aspects of the transfiguration not found in Mark's account (e.g., "as the sun," "white as light," "his face shone," and "the bright cloud" in Matt. 17:2, 5).<sup>71</sup> The paragraphs below will address (1) the content of the phenomena, (2) the disciples' responses, and (3) relevant data in the subsequent context.

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<sup>71</sup> The following discussion of Matthew's transfiguration will not include detailed interact with textual elements that overlap with the baptism scene (e.g., "Son of God") or with Mark's Gospel (e.g., Peter's suggestion to build three tents). Rather, only differences or developments introduced in Matthew will be discussed.



### *Content of Jesus' Transfiguration in Matthew*

#### **1. Matthew's Luminary Contrast with Sinai (Matthew 17:2, 5)**

Matthew's visual description of the transfiguration contrasts Jesus with Moses and Elijah because Matthew emphasizes Jesus' brightness when compared to Mark. Matthew 17:2 supplements Mark's visionary detail: Jesus' face "shines like the sun" (ἐλαμψεν τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος), his clothes turn "white as light" (ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο λευκὰ ὡς τὸ φῶς), and Matt. 17:5 even adds brightness to the cloud (νεφέλη φωτεινή). Many commentators view Jesus' shining face as an allusion to Moses on Mount Sinai.<sup>72</sup>

However, several observations may temper this scholarly certitude. First and most obvious, the very presence of Moses at the transfiguration would be strange if the author was trying to establish Jesus as a second Moses.<sup>73</sup> Second, in Exodus 34 Moses' transfiguration became visible after talking to God, whereas Jesus' transfiguration occurs before and apart from the appearance of the cloud.<sup>74</sup> That is, Moses' luminescence is derived and Jesus' brightness is "native" to him, not a result of his contact with God.<sup>75</sup> Third, Davies and Allison point out that Matthew does quote neither the LXX nor MT exactly, which say that the "skin of his face" was shining (Exod. 34:5).<sup>76</sup> Lastly, the cloud at Sinai was not "bright" as is Matthew's cloud (Matt. 17:5). As France notes, the contrast [between Jesus and Moses] is as great as the similarities, and the appearance of Jesus in this context could be as much a comparison to other heavenly figures as to Moses.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, 687, in view of the textual similarity noted above, say that the Jesus–Moses typology is "certain." See also D. C. Allison, *The New Moses* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993).

<sup>73</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 396. This observation was made in the discussion on Mark's account as well.

<sup>74</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 396.

<sup>75</sup> France, *Matthew*, 647.

<sup>76</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, 685.

<sup>77</sup> France, *Matthew*, 647, cites the following biblical references as possible comparisons to Jesus in Matt. 17: Matt. 28:3, Mark 16:5; Matt. 24:4 (clothes looking like lightning); John 20:12; Acts 1:10 (white clothes); Dan 10:5–6; 12:3; Rev 1:13–16; Ps 104:2). Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 397, calls Matthew's Christology "polyvalent" and "a story that permits several possibilities of association."

The above points do not deny what one might call “recollections” or “reminiscences” of the Sinai account.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, Matthew’s allusions to Sinai through the description of Jesus’ face and his positioning of Moses in front of Elijah are compelling.<sup>79</sup> But it is difficult to contend that Jesus in Matthew is validated by his likeness to Moses. As Lee helpfully puts it, “while Jesus’ face at the Transfiguration clearly reminds readers of Moses’ experience at the Sinai Theophany, it is questionable whether Matthew, by mentioning his radiant face, intends to legitimize Jesus as the new Moses. . . .”<sup>80</sup> These parallels with Sinai, along with the differences, establish the transfiguration as a different and greater event than Sinai. And yet, just as significant as any Sinai echo is the idea that Moses and Elijah are figures that met with God on mountaintops.<sup>81</sup> As in Mark, neither Moses nor Elijah is described physically. Yet in Matthew, Jesus’ appearance changes so much that he is only likened to the sun (Matt. 17:2).<sup>82</sup> In this way, the contrast between Jesus and both Moses and Elijah in Matthew is even greater than it is in Mark, because Matthew places a greater emphasis on Jesus’ brightness.

## 2. Jesus’ Visual Correspondence with God (Matthew 17:5)

Matthew’s visionary detail in this account indicates his interest in adding a “dimension of glory” to Jesus through this revelatory event.<sup>83</sup> Matthew’s account contains a “bright” cloud,

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<sup>78</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 396.

<sup>79</sup> S. S. Lee, *Jesus’ Transfiguration and the Believers’ Transformation* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 93; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 685. The emphasis Davies and Allison place on Matthew’s realignment of Moses and Elijah is misplaced. In Mark 9:5, during Peter’s “tent” suggestion, Mark reverses the order, putting Elijah before Moses. Matthew may have simply been reconciling the first citation of the men in his account.

<sup>80</sup> Lee, *Transfiguration*, 95.

<sup>81</sup> M. D. Hooker, *Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: A & C Black, 1997), 214–15; A. Y. Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 416–17; J. Marcus, *Mark 8–16*, AB (London: Yale University Press, 2009), 632; Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 397.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Mark 9:3, where Mark says that Jesus’ clothes were whiter than any launderer on earth could whiten them.

<sup>83</sup> France, *Matthew*, 647.

followed by a divine voice, both of which are manifestations of the presence of God.<sup>84</sup> The addition of “bright” (φωτεινή) to describe the cloud is in keeping with Matthew’s emphasis on the luminous.<sup>85</sup> Commentators agree that this added description of the cloud recalls the visible manifestation of God to Israel in the wilderness and in the sanctuary (Exod. 13:21–22; 33:9–10; 40:34–38).<sup>86</sup> Thus, the Evangelist emphasizes God’s glorious presence on the mountaintop.<sup>87</sup>

Gundry sees Matthew’s use of “light” language in the description of Jesus’ face (Matt. 17:2, ἔλαμψεν τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος) and clothes (Matt. 17:2, φῶς) as parallel with that of the cloud (Matt. 17:5, φωτεινή).<sup>88</sup> Jesus’ face, his clothes, and the cloud are the only luminous items at the transfiguration, suggesting a link between the three. This means that the reference to God’s glory that is invoked by the brightness of the cloud is also the appropriate reference for Jesus’ face and clothes. That is, if the brightness of the cloud is most readily interpreted as an indication of divine linkage, then Jesus’ face and clothes are as well.

### 3. “Listen to” the Faithful Son (Matthew 17:5)

Matthew’s transfiguration account repeats the baptismal phrase “in whom I am well pleased” as a reinforcement of Matthew’s faithful servant quotation of Matt. 12:18–20 (cf. Isa. 42:1–

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<sup>84</sup> France, *Matthew*, 647.

<sup>85</sup> M.-J. Lagrange, *Evangile Selon Saint Matthieu* (Paris: Victor Lecoffre, 1923), 335, “L’addition de φωτεινή dans Matt. est bien dans son thème de lumière.” Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, 702, cite other sources that also associate light with clouds: Ezek. 1:4; Rev 1:14; Liv. Proph. Jer. 14, 18; T. Abr. A 9:8; Apoc. Adam 71:9–10; 75:19–20.

<sup>86</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, 686; France, *Matthew*, 649; Keener, *Matthew*, 438–39; Nolland, *Matthew*, 703–704; L. Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, PNTCS (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 440.

<sup>87</sup> Schweizer, *Matthew*, 349; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, 701, “there seems to have been some expectation that the cloud of the wilderness would return at the consummation (Isa. 4:5; 2 Macc 2:8).”

<sup>88</sup> Gundry, *Matthew*, 344.

4). That is, God is pleased in Jesus, who has obeyed him in all respects.<sup>89</sup> Gnilka writes, “Jesus durch das Zitat in einem programmatischen Sinn als Knecht Gottes vorgestellt wird.”<sup>90</sup> Thus, Jesus’ identity and role as God’s servant, not long after his declaration that his mission would involve suffering (Matt. 16:21), “recalls again the figure of the ... servant of God” in Isa. 42:1–4.<sup>91</sup> Hence, Jesus’ faithfulness to God as the “beloved Son” is reiterated at the transfiguration as well.

As in Mark, Matthew includes God’s command that the disciples “listen to him” (Matt. 17:5, ἀκούετε αὐτοῦ) recollecting the prophet like Moses from Deut. 18:15, 18 (αὐτοῦ ἀκούσεσθε, LXX). The future tense is replaced by the imperative in Matthew, which likely means “more than just ‘hear’ ... [and] often means ‘obey’, as in Exod. 6:12 and 2 Chron. 28.11.”<sup>92</sup>

The significance of God’s “listen to him” at the transfiguration is far reaching.<sup>93</sup> Pedersen sums up by calling Jesus the eschatological “bearer of revelation” (Offenbarungsträger).<sup>94</sup> Lee even shows that this implication established in Mark is maintained in Matthew’s and Luke’s accounts as well.<sup>95</sup> Jesus is the faithful and beloved son who hereafter should be obeyed as he carries out his mission on the way to the cross. Hagner adds, “this now takes on enormously heightened significance . . . Jesus is the Messiah in whom God delights (Isa. 42:1) but also the . . . Servant . . . the unique Son of God who possesses unique authority” as he serves God’s redemptive agenda on his way to the cross.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 398.

<sup>90</sup> J. Gnilka, *Das Matthäusevangelium* (Freiburg: Herder, 1986), 451.

<sup>91</sup> France, *Matthew*, 650.

<sup>92</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, 703; Lee, *Transfiguration*, 17, 35.

<sup>93</sup> Heil, *Transfiguration*, 210–15; Lee, *Transfiguration*, 14–15, 35, 120.

<sup>94</sup> S. Pedersen, “Die Proklamation Jesus als des eschatologischen Offenbarungsträgers (Mt 17.1–13),” *NovT* 17 (1975): 241–64, 255.

<sup>95</sup> Lee, *Transfiguration*, 100–20.

<sup>96</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 495.

### Summary of the Content of Jesus' Transfiguration in Matthew

As at the baptism, God is present and speaks at the transfiguration. God is even visually represented in the form of the cloud in this account. The transfiguration also contrasts Jesus with two of Israel's most important figures in Moses and Elijah. With these two men standing as dim comparisons to Jesus on the mountain, Jesus is by comparison greater. More clearly than the baptism, the transfiguration ascribes to Jesus the authority to speak on God's behalf. In his revelatory experience, God's voice tells the disciples to "listen to" Jesus particularly as he carries out God's plan of redemption at the cross and in the resurrection. The section below will examine how the disciples respond to the content of this revelatory act of God.

#### *Response of the Disciples*

Peter, James, and John are at the transfiguration and Peter's response is the only one recorded during the event. Several observations related to Peter's response are relevant. First, Peter addresses the transfigured Jesus as "Lord" in Matthew (Matt. 17:4; cf. "Rabbi" in Mark 9:5), a fitting change for the context of his Gospel.<sup>97</sup> "Rabbi" has negative connotations in Matthew (unlike Mark) and would not have been appropriate in this context.<sup>98</sup> "Lord," on the other hand, is used 76 times in Matthew and has already been used by Peter on several occasions by Matthew 17.<sup>99</sup> Commenting on "Lord" in Matthew, Nolland writes, "to address

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<sup>97</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 699. A search of the English gloss "Lord" in the Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon (<http://call.cn.huc.edu/>) shows that the Aramaic *rbwn* can mean either "rabbi" or "lord."

<sup>98</sup> Ραββί is used only four times in Matthew, all of which have negative connotations. Matthew 23:7–8 uses the title twice in condemnation of the Pharisees and Matt. 26:25, 49 has the title on the lips of Judas.

<sup>99</sup> The title κύριος is used 76 distinct times in Matthew (excluding the three occurrences of "κύριε, κύριε" and the variant in 20:30) and are distributed fairly evenly throughout the Gospel. Of these uses, κύριος is used for God 17 times (22% of total usages: Matt. 1:20, 22, 24; 2:13, 15, 19; 4:7, 10; 5:33; 9:38; 11:25; 21:9; 21:42; 22:37, 43; 23:39; 28:2), for Jesus 26 times (34% of total usages: Matt. 7:21, 22; 8:2, 6, 8, 21, 25; 9:28; 12:8; 14:28, 30; 15:22, 25, 27 twice; 16:22; 17:4, 15; 18:21; 20:31, 33; 21:3; 24:42; 25:37, 44;

Jesus as ‘Lord’ ... implies a serious level of engagement with him, as illustrated by the episodes in ch. 8.”<sup>100</sup> Matthew omits any mention of ignorance on the part of the disciples, as in Mark 9:6. Thus, Peter’s “Lord” address shows a positive disposition on his part toward Jesus at the outset of the transfiguration event.<sup>101</sup>

Second, Peter defers to Jesus as the most important figure at the transfiguration.<sup>102</sup> Peter addresses and defers to Jesus by the εἰ θέλεις preface to his suggestion (Matt. 17:4). Peter’s deferral to Jesus in the presence of Moses and Elijah underscores their positive disposition toward Jesus: the transfiguration in Matthew is not an effort to compare Jesus to Moses or Elijah as much as it is the Evangelist’s attempt to set Jesus apart.

Third, Peter asks Jesus if he can build three tents to preserve the event. Matthew does not mention that this gesture is one of ignorance as does Mark (Mark 9:5) and yet Peter’s suggestion goes unacknowledged. As discussed in the previous chapter, commentators agree that Peter’s tent suggestion has eschatological implications. Thus, Peter’s comment shows his visual recognition of the phenomena but the text says little about whether or not he is engaging with what this vision signifies.

Fourth, the disciples’ fear in Matthew is in direct response to what they hear the voice say, not what they see (Matt. 17:6, καὶ ἀκούσαντες οἱ μαθηταὶ ἔπεσαν ἐπὶ πρόσωπον αὐτῶν

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26:22), and in an OT passage about God applied to Jesus 5 times (7% of total usages: Matt. 3:3/Isa. 40:3; 22:44/Ps 110:1 twice; 22:45/Ps 110:1; 27:10/Zech 11:13). Κύριος is used by Jesus 26 times (34% of total) where the referent is unclear, most of which occur in parables (Matt. 10:24, 25; 13:27; 18:25, 27, 31, 32, 34; 20:8; 21:30, 40; 24:45, 46, 48, 50; 25:11, 18, 19, 20, 21 twice, 22, 23 twice, 24, 26). Two κύριος references in Matthew are unambiguously *not* a reference to Jesus or God (Matt. 6:24; 27:63). Nolland, *Matthew*, 702, notes Peter’s frequent use of κύριος.

<sup>100</sup> Nolland, *Matthew*, 339, is commenting on Matt. 7:21, but later references this comment in his discussion on the transfiguration.

<sup>101</sup> Nolland, *Matthew*, 339 n. 82.

<sup>102</sup> The First Gospel retains the prominence of Peter at the transfiguration in keeping with his emphasis on Peter over other disciples (Matt. 16:16–18). Matthew includes the first-person caveat, “If you want, I will make . . .” (17:4, εἰ θέλεις, ποιήσω) in Peter’s suggestion to build three tents for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, deferring to Jesus’ wishes and also speaking with reference to Jesus alone. Peter’s first-person reference does not preclude him speaking for the other disciples—Peter is Matthew’s representative of all the disciples and is therefore able to speak alone as he represents them all. See Lee, *Transfiguration*, 106.

καὶ ἐφοβήθησαν σφόδρα). By this point in the transfiguration account, Moses and Elijah had appeared (Matt. 17:3), Jesus’ face “shone as the sun” (Matt. 17:2), his clothes become as white as light (Matt. 17:2), and the cloud overshadows them (Matt. 17:5), and yet Matthew says what the disciples *hear* gives rise to their fear. Thus, something about either the manner or content of the voice’s statement terrifies the disciples.

Most of the information in the voice’s statement is not new to the disciples by this point in the Gospel. Peter had already confessed Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of the living God” in Matt. 16:16 (ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος). But the voice’s command, “listen to him” (Matt. 17:5, ἀκούετε αὐτοῦ) is something the disciples had neither heard nor realized before Matthew 17 (judged also by Peter’s impudent response to Jesus in Matt. 16:22). Prior to the transfiguration, Peter recognizes Jesus as the Son of God, but does not credit him with having the authority to speak definitively about the will of God. Here, Peter is rebuked again for his response to Jesus (Matt. 16:23) and is told by the voice that Jesus is able to testify accurately to matters only accessible to God.<sup>103</sup> Therefore, the voice’s statement may have seemed to Peter like the rebuke of God following on from his earlier confrontation with Jesus.

Fifth, even given the wider implications of the voice’s command to “listen to him,” the disciples do, in fact, listen to Jesus’ command to “get up and do not be afraid” (Matt. 17:7, προσῆλθεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ ἀψάμενος αὐτῶν εἶπεν· ἐγέρθητε καὶ μὴ φοβεῖσθε).<sup>104</sup> That is, after the voice tells the disciples to listen to Jesus, the disciples would hear Jesus’ consolation (“fear not”) with the import ascribed to him by the voice. Jesus is an authoritative

<sup>103</sup> A reference to someone “falling on his face” is used one other time in Matthew (26:39), as Jesus begs God to “take this cup” (καὶ προελθὼν μικρὸν ἔπεσεν ἐπὶ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ προσευχόμενος καὶ λέγων· πατέρα μου, εἰ δυνατόν ἐστιν, παρελθάτω ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ τὸ ποτήριον τοῦτο). The word προσεύχομαι is added to describe the specific nature of his prostration. At the transfiguration, no qualifying verb is used to describe the nature of the disciples response, therefore it is not appropriate to assume anything specific.

<sup>104</sup> In lieu of the wider implications of the command, commentators generally miss the fact that the disciples do listen to Jesus’ command to “fear not.”

spokesperson in the situation and has the ability to dispel the disciples' fears. The disciples respond positively to Jesus' consolation, as if they obey the voice's command to "listen" to Jesus. The text records no immediate dissent on their part. This observation may indicate that the disciples do understand more about Jesus as a result of the transfiguration event. However, the true import of God's "listen to him" command is lost on the disciples, as is discussed below.

### *Subsequent Context*

In view of the context subsequent to the transfiguration, the responses of Peter, James, and John are less impressive. After the event, the disciples descend the mountain with Jesus and unsuccessfully attempt to cast a demon out of a boy. When asked why, Jesus says, "Because of your little faith" (Matt. 17:20, διὰ τὴν ὀλιγοπιστίαν ὑμῶν). This is the only instance in Matthew's Gospel in which the disciples fail in this way. This scene immediately following the transfiguration is telling for the effect of the transfiguration for bolstering the disciples' reverence for Jesus.

Only a few verses later, Jesus tells his disciples about his impending Passion and resurrection. Their response is not one of acceptance of God's plan or acknowledgement of Jesus' authority to prophesy what will come, but is instead one of "great distress" (Matt. 17:23, καὶ ἐλυπήθησαν σφόδρα). This phrase replaces Mark's "they did not understand what he said and were afraid" (Mark 9:32). Evans notes Matthew's tendency to "tone down . . . Mark's references to the disciples obduracy and lack of understanding."<sup>105</sup> Luz notes that "for Matthew 'understand' is more likely to mean something 'intellectual,' [therefore] he

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<sup>105</sup> Evans, *Matthew*, 326.



must be more precise than Mark. The disciples ‘understood’ quite well what Jesus said, but they cannot accept what they understand.”<sup>106</sup> Whether Matthew’s use of “great distress” in fact “tones down,” or “qualifies” Mark’s language, both indicate the disciples’ hesitation about Jesus’ prediction of the most significant forthcoming events in Jesus’ ministry and life.

### *Conclusion to Jesus’ Transfiguration in Matthew*

Thus, God’s revelatory act in the transfiguration initially produces a positive response in the disciples but the narrative subsequent to the event shows Jesus still considers them of “little faith.” That is, the transfiguration shows that the disciples are renewed in their obedience to Jesus as he tells them to stand up and not fear. Even though they think the terrifying visions are still present, they lift their heads anyway as they “listen to” Jesus. However, the subsequent context shows that neither the vision of Jesus in glory nor God’s vocal affirmation of him convince the disciples to “listen to” Jesus’ as he predicts his coming Passion and resurrection. This revelatory experience would appear to give the disciples all the information about Jesus needed to make more informed decisions about him, and the general disposition of the disciples toward Jesus at and after the transfiguration is positive, although the event produces only marginal change.

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<sup>106</sup> Luz, *Matthew* 8–20, 411.

## The Crucifixion Phenomena (Matthew 27:45–54)

In Matthew’s crucifixion account, the centurion and those with him witness the revelatory acts of God and respond with reverence for Jesus.<sup>107</sup> The crucifixion scene includes the three hours of darkness and the tearing of the temple curtain—both are very similar to Mark’s account (cf. Matt. 27:45–48; Mark 15:33–36). However, much of Matthew’s account after the tearing of the veil is distinct to his Gospel. He describes the rocks splitting (Matt. 27:51, αἱ πέτραι ἐσχίσθησαν), the graves being opened (Matt. 27:52, τὰ μνημεῖα ἀνεώχθησαν), and the appearing of these believers to others after Jesus’ resurrection (Matt. 27:53, ἐξελθόντες ἐκ τῶν μνημείων μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ εἰσῆλθον εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν καὶ ἐνεφανίσθησαν πολλοῖς). Matthew specifically adds that the centurion’s declaration is a response to “the earthquake and the things that happened” (Matt. 27:54, τὸν σεισμὸν καὶ τὰ γενόμενα ἐφοβήθησαν).

### *Content of the Crucifixion Phenomena*

#### **1. Death and the Three Hours of Darkness (Matthew 27:45–50)**

Matthew employs darkness imagery much more than does the Mark and therefore Matthew’s “three hours of darkness” (Matt. 27:45) is a response of divine judgment to the crucifixion of Jesus.<sup>108</sup> Outside of the crucifixion event, Matthew includes seven references to darkness,

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<sup>107</sup> The magi of Matt. 2:1–10 respond to the star with belief in Jesus, although the text does not portray the moment in which this “conversion” takes place. That is, the magi arrive in Jerusalem already convinced that Jesus is worthy of worship. By contrast, Matthew 27 shows the development of christological conviction in the soldiers.

<sup>108</sup> The only grammatical differences between the Matthean and Markan darkness are: (1) Matthew’s choice of “over all the land” (27:45, ἐπὶ πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν) versus Mark’s “over the whole land” (Mark 15:33, ἐφ’ ὅλην τὴν γῆν) and (2) Mark’s repeated use of γίνομαι compared to Matthew’s singular use of the verb.

whereas Mark only has one.<sup>109</sup> Although one of Matthew’s references to darkness (σκότος) is unclear,<sup>110</sup> the remaining uses of σκότος or one of its cognates are in reference to evil, death, or judgment for the wicked. For example, Matt. 4:16 includes a quotation of Isa. 9:1–2 (LXX) where “the people who were sitting in darkness” (ὁ λαὸς ὁ καθήμενος ἐν σκότει) is paralleled with “the ones in the land and shadow of death” (καὶ τοῖς καθημένοις ἐν χώρᾳ καὶ σκιᾷ θανάτου). In this passage, “darkness” is portrayed as a place of desolation in which the “great light” shines. Another example of Matthean associations with σκότος is Matt. 6:23, which says, “If your eyes are evil, your whole body will be dark” (ἐὰν δὲ ὁ ὀφθαλμός σου πονηρὸς ᾖ, ὅλον τὸ σῶμά σου σκοτεινὸν ἔσται). Darkness and evil are paired together in this statement, making darkness a marker of the presence of evil. Other examples come from the several references to darkness as a place where the wicked/unbelievers are thrown (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30). Lastly, Matt. 24:29 is described in apocalyptic terms as a time of tribulation when “the sun will be darkened ...” (ὁ ἥλιος σκοτισθήσεται).

Thus, Matthew’s use of “darkness” imagery is an association with sin, evil, and death. The crucifixion account would therefore be an appropriate place to introduce darkness for a final time. As God’s son is crucified and many unbelievers scorn him, sin, death, and evil remain active in the scene. Despite this revelatory omen of God, most onlookers fail to be warned in their reactions to Jesus (Matt. 27:47–49).

## **2. The Veil Tears, the Earth Quakes, and the Dead are Raised (Matthew 27:51–53)**

The tearing of the veil, the splitting, of rocks and earthquake, and the resurrection of many believers in Matthew are positive signs of the significance of Jesus both in the creation, in

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<sup>109</sup> Cf. Matt. 4:16; 6:23; 8:12; 10:27; 22:13; 24:29; 25:30; Mark 13:24.

<sup>110</sup> Although in a passage on the coming of the son of man, Matt. 10:27 is ambiguous in its use of “darkness” (ὁ λέγω ὑμῖν ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ εἵπατε ἐν τῷ φωτί, καὶ ὁ εἰς τὸ οὐς ἀκούετε κηρύξατε ἐπὶ τῶν δωμάτων).

redemption, and for the temple cult.<sup>111</sup> Luz sees the tearing of the veil, the earthquake and the rocks splitting as a sign of God's judgment for Jesus' death. Because the crucifixion depicts the martyrdom of an innocent man, Luz believes the two signs connected with this martyrdom therefore must each be "a sign of disaster."<sup>112</sup> Because he understands the tearing of the veil and the earthquake/rocks as primarily ominous signs, his interpretation of the particular details of these signs fits this profile. For example, when wondering whether the outer or inner veil was torn, Luz concludes that the outer must be in view as it would be "more suitable for an interpretation as a sign of disaster."<sup>113</sup> He reasons that, because the tearing of the veil is a sign of disaster, therefore it must be viewable by all. He says, "earthquakes are God's eschatological self-revelation in the last judgment."<sup>114</sup> And this Matthean earthquake at the crucifixion, involving the splitting of rocks, "is not a normal quake; it is a supernatural quake that upsets the entire natural world."<sup>115</sup> However, Luz' judgment on these points is questionable for the following reasons.

First, addressing the earthquake, Matthew's Gospel includes five times more references to earthquakes than any other Gospel.<sup>116</sup> None of the references to earthquakes outside of

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<sup>111</sup> As stated in chapter 1, the tearing of the veil is not formally considered a revelatory portent in this thesis, yet because it Matthew includes it with the other signs, the tearing of the temple veil is also addressed.

<sup>112</sup> U. Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, trans. J. E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 565–66, cites Virgil, *Georg*, 1.475–82, Lucian, *The Passing of Peregrinus*, and one Buddhist parallel. A. J. Edmunds, *Buddhist and Christian Gospels*, 3rd ed. (Tokyo: Yoko-kwan, 1905), 189–90. See also Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19–28*, 632, who cite judgment for human wickedness: Origen, *Contra Celsum*, Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Cyprian, *Epistles*. The advent of God—Judges 5:4; Ps. 18:6–8; *Testament of Levi* 3:9; Josephus *Ant.*, 7.77; Acts 4:31. The death of great persons—Isa. 5:25; 24:17–18; 29:6; Ezek. 38:19; Artapanus in Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel*. General tragedy—Virgil, *Georg*, Lucian, *Passing*, are also occasions for earthquakes in ancient literature.

<sup>113</sup> Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, 566.

<sup>114</sup> Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, 566.

<sup>115</sup> Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, 566.

<sup>116</sup> There are seven total references to earthquakes or the shaking of the ground in the Gospels: five in Matthew (8:24; 24:7; 27:51, 54; 28:2), one in Mark (13:8), one in Luke (21:11), and none in John. Of course, these statistics do not include Matthew's references to the shaking of people in fear and/or amazement (Matt. 21:10; 28:4), although these could be included as distant parallels and a demonstration of Matthew's use of the semantic range.

Matthew 27 allow “earthquake as God’s judgment” as even an interpretive possibility.<sup>117</sup> For example, when Jesus calms the storm Matt. 8:24–26, the evangelist writes, “And behold, there was a great earthquake in the sea, as the boat was covered by the waves ... then he rose and rebuked the wind and the sea and there was a great calm” (καὶ ἰδοὺ σεισμὸς μέγας ἐγένετο ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ, ὥστε τὸ πλοῖον καλύπτεσθαι ὑπὸ τῶν κυμάτων ... τότε ἐγερθεὶς ἐπετίμησεν τοῖς ἀνέμοις καὶ τῇ θαλάσῃ, καὶ ἐγένετο γαλήνη μεγάλη). In this passage, the earthquake is simply an occasion for Jesus to demonstrate his power over nature. No words of judgment in the passage are connected to the occurrence of the earthquake.<sup>118</sup>

In Matt. 28:2, Matthew includes an earthquake at the empty tomb. “And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord—descending from heaven and approaching—moved the stone and sat on it....” (καὶ ἰδοὺ σεισμὸς ἐγένετο μέγας· ἄγγελος γὰρ κυρίου καταβάς ἐξ οὐρανοῦ καὶ προσελθὼν ἀπεκύλισεν τὸν λίθον καὶ ἐκάθητο ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ). In the above context, the earthquake is a product of the angel’s coming and moving the stone. Judgment is not in view.

Matthew 24:7 contains earthquakes in a passage where the context is ambiguous. “For nation will rise up against nation and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines and earthquakes in various places” (ἐγερθήσεται γὰρ ἔθνος ἐπὶ ἔθνος καὶ βασιλεία ἐπὶ βασιλείαν καὶ ἔσονται λιμοὶ καὶ σεισμοὶ κατὰ τόπους). France reflects on the context of this passage when saying, “the events described are *not* part of an eschatological scenario, but rather routine events within world history which must not be given more weight than they deserve. Each generation . . . is tempted to think that its own experiences are somehow worse

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<sup>117</sup> Earthquakes are mentioned in the following verses: Matt. 8:24; 24:7; 27:51; 27:54; 28:2.

<sup>118</sup> Jesus’ rebukes the disciples in 8:26, but this rebuke has nothing to do with the existence of the earthquake.

and of more ultimate significance than the sufferings of other generations, but ‘it is not yet the end’.”<sup>119</sup>

In Matthew 27, the earthquake and splitting of the rocks are not portrayed as acts of vengeance upon those who killed Jesus, for none of Jesus’ executioners are said to die or even to notice the sign.<sup>120</sup> Instead, the earthquake and the splitting of the rocks are each likely a positive and prophetic statement of the significance of Jesus’ death.

Second, the resurrection of the dead is linked with the earthquake in Matt 27:51–52 as the author explains ἡ γῆ ἐσείσθη as καὶ αἱ πέτραι ἐσχίσθησαν καὶ τὰ μνημεῖα ἀνέφχθησαν.<sup>121</sup> This seismic event, therefore, opens the graves of believers and prepares for the raising of these saints (ἀγίων; Matt. 27:52–53).<sup>122</sup> Although the timing of the raising of these saints is disputed,<sup>123</sup> this is a positive, prophetic sign of the significance of Jesus’ resurrection, as Matthew says that those who are raised go into Jerusalem after Jesus himself has been raised (Matt. 27:53, καὶ ἐξελθόντες ἐκ τῶν μνημείων μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ). Brown remarks, “this sign shows the positive side of the divine judgment centered on the death of God’s Son: The good are rewarded as well as the evil punished.”<sup>124</sup> That is, the redemption of believers is prefigured in this reference to the resurrection of the saints.

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<sup>119</sup> France, *Matthew*, 902, italics original.

<sup>120</sup> J. H. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 144, “were the earthquake a divine judgment against those who kill [Jesus] ... why were not the agents of that shameful death themselves destroyed like the wicked tenants in 21:41?... Matthew’s narrative contains mention of divine vengeance for insults (21:40–41; 23:36, 38; 27:25),” but not in this context.

<sup>121</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 13–28*, 849. K. L. Waters, “Matthew 27:52–53 as Apocalyptic Apostrophe: Temporal-Spatial Collapse in the Gospel of Matthew,” *JBL* 122 (2003): 489–515, sees these saints as the “Christian martyrs of Rev 20:4, 6” and the “holy city” as the new Jerusalem of Rev. 21:2.

<sup>122</sup> Notice also that Jerusalem is called the “holy city” (τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν). Were Jerusalem under judgment for crucifying Jesus, one would think Matthew may default to its proper name (Ἱερουσαλήμ), as he does in Matt. 23:37. Matthew 23:37 is the only other text in Matthew where the proper name is used, and it is a statement in which the killing of the prophets and the stoning of those sent to it is lamented by Jesus (Ἱερουσαλὴμ Ἱερουσαλὴμ, ἡ ἀποκτείνουσα τοὺς προφῆτας καὶ λιθοβολοῦσα τοὺς ἀπεσταλμένους πρὸς αὐτήν).

<sup>123</sup> See Waters, “Apocalyptic”; Brown, *Death*, 1120–33; See also M. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010), 303–18.

<sup>124</sup> Brown, *Death*, 1125.

Regarding the tearing of the temple veil, neither the veil (τὸ καταπέτασμα) nor any use of the verb “to tear” (σχίζω) is referenced outside of this context in the Gospel.<sup>125</sup> One popular way to interpret the rending of the veil is as a sign of God’s judgment on the temple. Luz, joined by Davies and Allison, notes this sign as one of the “impending destruction” of the temple. “For the readers of the Gospel of Matthew who are aware of Jesus’ prediction of the coming destruction of the temple . . . an interpretation of the destruction of the temple was . . . likely.”<sup>126</sup> However, having shown that the earthquake and splitting of the rocks were not signs of God’s judgment, one questions whether the tearing of the veil should be interpreted as such.

Thus, if the tearing of the veil signifies judgment, it seems odd that none of Matthew’s references to the destruction of the temple allude to the veil.<sup>127</sup> Neither in Jesus’ cleansing of the temple (Matt. 21:12–13), nor Jesus’ prediction of temple stones being thrown down (Matt. 24:1–2), nor in the accusations of Jesus about the temple destruction (Matt. 26:61; 27:40), is the veil in view. As Gurtner writes, “The assumption that ‘rent veil = temple destruction’ is a speculation that to date has not been substantiated. There is, quite simply, no documented evidence that establishes the association.”<sup>128</sup> Gurtner continues on the portrayal of the temple in Matthew’s Gospel when saying, “No negative word is uttered by either the evangelist or his Jesus about the temple *itself*. Indeed, Matthean redaction seems to stifle texts where Mark’s Jesus could be understood as anti-temple, and Matthean negative

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<sup>125</sup> Σχίζω is used twice in 27:51, referring to the rending of the veil and the splitting of rocks.

<sup>126</sup> Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, 566. See also Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19–28*, 630–31.

<sup>127</sup> See the argument of G. Lindeskog, “The Veil of the Temple,” in *In Honorem Antonii Fridrichsen Sexagenarii*, ed. B. Reicke, *Coniectanea Neotestamentica* 11 (Lund: Gleerup, 1947), 132–37.

<sup>128</sup> D. M. Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew’s Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, SNTSMS 139 (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), 11.

statements about it, such as its impending (or past?) destruction, are centred on confrontations with the religious leaders who mismanage it.”<sup>129</sup>

Also, the earthquake, the splitting of rocks, and the tearing of the veil are proximally grouped together in the structure of the passage, and are thus separated from the sign of darkness that comes five verses earlier. These three phenomena are all preceded by the conjunctive phrase καὶ ἰδοὺ and the action of the tearing of the veil and rocks uses the same verb, σχίζω. That is, these phenomena are all after-effects of Jesus’ death, which occurs in the previous verse. When Jesus gives up his spirit, Matthew says, “and behold, the veil was torn [ἐσχίσθη] ... and the earth shook and the rocks split [ἐσχίσθησαν].” These signs, although occurring in the same setting as the three hours of darkness, are grammatically set apart. This is the first indication that Matthew intends the tearing of the veil as a statement of the implications of Jesus’ death rather than judgment for his crucifixion.

Rather than a statement of judgment on the temple, the tearing of the veil in Matthew seems to be a sign of Jesus’ importance with reference to the temple cult. One of Jesus’ self-references, “something greater than the temple is here” (Matt. 12:6, τοῦ ἱεροῦ μείζον ἐστὶν ὧδε), could be the first sign that the broader implications of Jesus’ death for the temple are in view for Matthew. Gurtner takes Matt. 12:6 in concert with the Gospel’s overwhelmingly positive view of the temple as indications of Jesus’ superiority to the temple. In the context of Matthew 12, the temple “is a valid place to offer sacrifices and (later) to pray, but ultimately it is secondary (as a means of relationship with God) to Jesus.”<sup>130</sup> It seems, then, that Matthew’s account of the tearing of the veil is a visual statement of the relationship of Jesus to the temple cult. Although affirming the general existence and role of the temple, it is not more important than Jesus himself.

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<sup>129</sup> Gurtner, *Veil*, 100, italics original.

<sup>130</sup> Gurtner, *Veil*, 108.



### Summary of the Content of the Crucifixion Phenomena

The three hours of darkness, tearing of the veil, earthquake, and resurrection of believers are a divine communication in light of the crucifixion of Jesus. The three hours of darkness at the crucifixion is consistent with darkness in the rest of Matthew's Gospel and is a reference to evil, death, or judgment for the wicked. The tearing of the veil, the earthquake, and the resurrection of the saints are best explained as positive and prophetic divine reverberations of the significance of Jesus' death both for creation, redemption, and the temple cult. This time some of Matthew's witnesses do respond to the revelatory phenomena and the section below will examine these responses.

### *Response of the Soldiers*

The centurion, other soldiers with the centurion, and the crowds are present at the crucifixion scene and the centurion and those with him respond to God's revelatory activity with reverence for Jesus.<sup>131</sup> Davies and Allison point out that "the ones with him" and "the ones keeping watch over him" (Matt. 27:54) recall the mocking guards in Matt. 27:36 who "kept watch over him there" (καὶ καθήμενοι ἐτήρουν αὐτὸν ἐκεῖ).<sup>132</sup> Thus, the confession of Matthew's centurion and those with him emphasizes both their change of disposition toward Jesus and the stark difference between these Gentile onlookers and Jews that scorn Jesus in Matt. 27:47–50.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> This does not preclude the onlookers mentioned in 27:47–49. However, the centurion's declaration is the obvious "climactic theological moment" (France, *Matthew*, 1084; D. A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, vol. 33B, WBC (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1995), 848). D. J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, SP (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1991), 401, says that Matthew's inclusion of "those with him" makes the "confession into a chorus" (see also R. E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 1143–44).

<sup>132</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19–28*, 635.

<sup>133</sup> Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, 571.

For these soldiers, the phenomena they witness are a testimony about Jesus. These revelatory events at the crucifixion communicate something of Jesus' significance to them, so much so that Matt. 27:54 says that the soldiers, seeing the earthquake and the things that happened "feared greatly" (ἐφοβήθησαν σφόδρα). Osborne says the soldiers "experienced the power of God and recognized it for what it was, divine witness."<sup>134</sup> Morris agrees, "even to these Gentiles it was clear that there was something in the death of Jesus together with the attendant phenomena, that showed that he was not just another man. He had a special relationship to God, and it was important for Matthew that this be made clear."<sup>135</sup>

Regarding the specific statement of the centurion, the previous chapter has already discussed the anarthrous "Son of God" term<sup>136</sup> Referencing Matt. 27:54 in particular, Mowery argues that Mathew's θεοῦ υἱός "possesses several linguistic features that differ from the linguistic features characteristic of the First Gospel" and suggests this phrasing to be an early Christian "christological title."<sup>137</sup> Although it is difficult to demonstrate Mowery's claim in its entirety, his point that Matt. 14:23, 27:43, and 27:54 all contain θεοῦ υἱός is compelling. Luz agrees that "Son of God" is christologically very important for Matthew. "Jesus was revealed by God as God's Son (Matt. 2:15; 2:17; 17:5; cf. 11:27; 16:17) and confessed as such by the disciples (Matt. 15:33; 16:16)."<sup>138</sup> The confession of the centurion and his cohorts in Matt. 27:54 is the "positive analogue to the mocking of the Jews" in Matt 27:40, 43. Similar to the parallel reactions in Mark's Gospel, where the mockery of the Jews is offset by the praise of the lone centurion, Matthew preserves this comparison to highlight

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<sup>134</sup> G. R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 1047. The Jewish onlookers, on the other hand, do not even comment on the phenomena. Instead, Matthew portrays them as unmoved by what happens.

<sup>135</sup> Morris, *Matthew*, 726.

<sup>136</sup> See the previous "Mark" chapter, the section entitled *Centurion's Response*, especially footnote 120. See also Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 852.

<sup>137</sup> R. Mowery, "Subtle Differences: The Matthean 'Son of God' References," *NovT* 32 (1990): 193–200, 199.

<sup>138</sup> Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, 570.

both the vindication of Jesus and the stubborn unbelief of the Jewish people.<sup>139</sup> This point is also supported by Gnllka, who says, “Das Bekenntnis wird im Kontext zur positive Antithese der Lsterungen der Reprsentanten des jdischen Volkes. . . .”<sup>140</sup> “If these mockers demanded of the crucified man who claimed to be the Son of God that he verify who he was with his own demonstration of power, the Gentile soldiers state on the basis of what God has done that Jesus really was God’s Son.”<sup>141</sup> That is, the actions of God compel the centurion and those with him to declare Jesus as “God’s son.”<sup>142</sup> Observing these phenomena at Jesus’ death, the Gentiles realize that God is an advocate for him and that Jesus is indeed the one he was crucified for claiming to be.<sup>143</sup> Neyrey comments on the centurion’s declaration as one that “offers a public acknowledgment of the worth and status of Jesus by his correct interpretation of the posthumous events.”<sup>144</sup> Jesus, on whose behalf God is powerfully acting, is “truly” God’s Son.

### *Subsequent Context*

The crucifixion of Jesus may seem to be the climax of the Matthew’s Gospel with the brilliant display of revelatory signs in the midst of the tragic death of Jesus on the cross. However, the crucifixion is penultimate to the resurrection event, where the events of the crucifixion come to fruition in the lives of Jesus’ followers. Although at the crucifixion the confession of the centurion and his cohorts brings the event to its fullest expression (i.e.,

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<sup>139</sup> See my discussion on this in the previous chapter.

<sup>140</sup> J. Gnllka, *Das Matthusevangelium*, vol. 2 (Freiburg: Herder, 1988), 478.

<sup>141</sup> Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, 570.

<sup>142</sup> This is not to imply that the centurion sees all the phenomena. The tearing of the temple veil in particular would not have been visible to him and the other soldiers.

<sup>143</sup> France, *Matthew*, 1083, adds the observation that Matthew’s addition of soldiers to those who declare Jesus’ sonship validates their witness in cases of judgment or discipline (“two or three” from Matt. 18:16).

<sup>144</sup> Neyrey, *Honor*, 146.

producing reverence for Jesus in witnesses), still, Jesus' followers (the women in this scene) are literally and figuratively aloof during the event. Matthew 27:55–56 says that the women who provided for Jesus during his ministry were looking from a distance. Then, in Matt. 27:57–61, Joseph of Arimathea places Jesus' body in the tomb and the women watch. Matthew mentions nothing in these verses about the believing centurion but seems eager to bring some of Jesus' followers back into the narrative as witnesses to his death. Not coincidentally, these particular followers are those mentioned as discovering his resurrection. Evans says, "But Matthew must prepare for the discovery of the empty tomb in Matt 28:1–8 so he includes Mark's notice of the women who observe all that happened" including Matthew's note of the women present at Jesus' burial."<sup>145</sup>

Against Byrskog who notes a Matthean "dilution" in the burial scene, Matthew's burial narrative makes adamant mention of those who saw Jesus' burial (i.e., the women) and also of the concerted effort made by the Jews to keep the resurrection story from gaining more converts to the Jesus movement.<sup>146</sup> Unlike either Mark or Luke, the effort made by the Jewish authorities in Matthew heightens the importance of the event in the narrative even before it occurs. This effort on the part of the chief priests to gag Jesus' followers comes after Matthew records the Jewish leadership mocking Jesus on the cross (Matt. 27:41). Although Matthew offers no indication of the welfare of the confessing centurion and those with him after the crucifixion event, the Gospel here portrays Jesus' opponents as becoming more hardened against him. Thus, Matthew polarizes the crowd during the crucifixion scene, with some moving closer to Jesus in reverence for him and others keeping a distance, even more

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<sup>145</sup> Evans, *Matthew*, 468–69. For background on the importance of burial after death in the first century, see Keener, *Matthew*, 691–97.

<sup>146</sup> S. Byrskog, *Story as History—History as Story* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 191; Evans, *Matthew*, 469.

adamantly opposed to him than before. Meanwhile, the women stand in the ranks as Matthew prepares them to witness the empty tomb.

### *Conclusion to the Revelatory Experience at the Crucifixion*

Thus, Matthew's crucifixion scene offers an example of the revelatory acts of God eliciting a response of reverence for Jesus.<sup>147</sup> Many of the witnesses to these revelatory acts do not, in fact, respond with reverence for Jesus. The chief priests become more intensely opposed to Jesus and his movement, counting it all a matter of "deception" (Matt. 27:64).

The best explanation for this is that Matthew does not offer a one-to-one correlation between God's revelatory activity and reverential responses for Jesus. Instead, revelatory experiences are often the context in which reverence for Jesus develops, and yet the crucifixion scene shows that witnesses can react in different ways to the phenomena. Matthew does not explain what produces such disparate responses, but does not hide the tension of it either. Even the centurion's declaration shows a level of understanding beyond that which is contained in the revelatory phenomena. Therefore, the revelatory phenomena of the crucifixion are the catalyst for, but do not provide the substance of, christological discovery.

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<sup>147</sup> This christological affirmation of the soldiers is also notable since none of the crucifixion phenomena bear a distinguishable message about Jesus, as do the dreams, the baptism, and the transfiguration events in Matthew. One would not be surprised to see a "Son of God" declaration after the baptism or transfiguration. However, the declaration of the soldiers at the crucifixion is anomalous given the fact that the events do not disclose this information to him about Jesus.

## The Resurrection Event (Matthew 28:1–20)

The revelatory act of God in raising Jesus from the dead and the ensuing appearances to his followers is the pinnacle and resolution of Matthew Passion narrative and also the setting in which Jesus' followers are renewed in their reverence for him. Matthew 28 does not describe an unbeliever professing reverence for Jesus as with the centurion at the cross. However, those who are followers of Jesus throughout the Gospel and then despondent after his death are buoyed in spirit as their leader is risen from the dead and appears to them. Below, the (1) content of revelatory phenomena, the (2) responses of the witnesses, and (3) the subsequent context of the events will be examined to understand how revelatory acts of God relate to the reverence for Jesus in Matthew.

### *Content of the Revelatory Experiences of Matthew 28*

#### **1. Earthquake and Angelic Descent from Heaven (Matthew 28:1–9)**

The earthquake and descent of the angel are revelatory acts of God announcing that Jesus is risen from the dead. Matthew records that the women and guards witness a great earthquake and the descent of an angel from heaven that displaces the stone (Matt. 28:2, καὶ ἰδοὺ σεισμός ἐγένετο μέγας· ἄγγελος γὰρ κυρίου καταβὰς ἐξ οὐρανοῦ καὶ προσελθὼν ἀπεκύλισεν τὸν λίθον). Although earthquakes are not unusual in Matthew's Gospel,<sup>148</sup> the earthquakes of Matthew 27–28 in particular, mirror each other. In both events, earthquakes initiate a reanimation of the dead. Also in both cases, the earthquake accompanies the opening of tombs. Notwithstanding the parallels in these events, there are a few important differences that must be highlighted.

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<sup>148</sup> Matthew 8:24; 24:7; 27:51; 27:54; 28:2.

First, in Matthew 27, the earthquake causes the splitting of stones and thus the opening of the tombs of saints (Matt. 27:51–53). This opening of the saints’ tombs precedes the exit of the resurrected saints. In Matthew 28, the earthquake does not open Jesus’ tomb, but rather the descending angel “manually” opens Jesus’ tomb and sits on it. Thus, Jesus’ resurrection and exit happens prior to the removal of the stone from the tomb’s entrance. The angel removes the stone only to show the women that Jesus is gone.<sup>149</sup> Jesus’ exit from the tomb takes place earlier—an action that did not require the tomb to be opened. That is, the resurrection of the saints in Matthew 27 is a by-product of the earthquake whereas in Matthew 28 the earthquake is a by-product of Jesus’ resurrection.<sup>150</sup> Also, since Matthew 27’s earthquake happens in the context of Jesus’ death, both earthquakes draw attention to Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Second, Matthew 27 does not include an angel, whereas in Matthew 28 an angel is physically present for the first time in Matthew’s Gospel.<sup>151</sup> Unlike the earlier dream accounts, in which the angelic messengers are not physically described, Matthew portrays this angel as looking “like lightning,” with clothing “white as snow” (Matt. 28:3). As at the transfiguration, where both Jesus and the divine cloud were luminous, signaling the presence of God, so it is with Matthew’s angel (Matt. 28:3, ὡς ἀστραπή καὶ τὸ ἔνδυμα αὐτοῦ λευκὸν ὡς χιών). Matthew adds detail to the angel’s description above to ensure the reader knows what this being signifies, although Matthew’s account is somewhat less vivid than the Markan account.<sup>152</sup> Matthew 28:2 states the angel’s identity (κυρίου) and origin (καταβάς ἐξ οὐρανοῦ). God is again intervening in and through the resurrection.

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<sup>149</sup> D. L. Turner, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 681; Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, 596.

<sup>150</sup> France, *Matthew*, 1099, suggests that the earthquake is a product of the angel’s descent. See also Turner, *Matthew*, 681.

<sup>151</sup> The angels of Matthew 1–2 appear in dreams.

<sup>152</sup> Porter, “Mark 16:1–8,” 133.

## 2. Resurrection Reminders (Matthew 28:6, 7, 9–10)

Matthew 28 contains reminders of Jesus' predictions of events surrounding his resurrection as an indication of Jesus' newfound authority, reiterated in Matt. 28:16–20. In Matt. 28:6, the angel reminds the women that Jesus had told them about the resurrection during his earthly ministry as he instructs the women to examine the empty pallet within the tomb (ἡγέρθη γὰρ καθὼς εἶπεν). In the next verse, the angel repeats his message to the women, “Behold, I have told you!” (ἰδοὺ εἶπον ὑμῖν) before Jesus himself repeats for the third time the same message about his journey to Galilee (Matt 28:7, 9–10). Three observations about these “reminders” of Jesus' resurrection predictions are relevant:

First, Jesus' own predictions are the focus of these reminders and demonstrate the efficacy of Jesus' words before his death. This angelic reminder is not a blunt rebuke as in Luke's Gospel. But the subtle message to the women is that they should not be surprised: what they are witnessing has been known and proclaimed by Jesus before.

Second, after the angel musters his own authority when exhorting the women to return to Galilee, “Behold, I have told you” (Matt. 28:7, ἰδοὺ εἶπον ὑμῖν). Combined with the other signs of divine presence mentioned above, this addition to the angelic message sounds more like an authoritative declaration than simply the recognition that he had finished speaking. France compares this to the “I, the LORD, have spoken” (Num. 14:35; Ezek. 5:15, 17; cf. Isa. 1:2; 25:8; Joel 3:8 etc.) formulae in the Hebrew Bible, “the formula marks an authoritative pronouncement (perhaps even that the angels speaks for God), and functions now as a call to action.”<sup>153</sup> If recalling Jesus' earthly prophecy was not enough to motivate the women to action, the angel invokes his own heavenly authority to tell them what they must do.

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<sup>153</sup> France, *Matthew*, 1101.



Third, Galilee is an important part of the instructions that are given to the women by the angel and Jesus.<sup>154</sup> As in Mark, the geographic awareness of Matthew's Gospel is clear. Jesus' ministry begins in Galilee and culminates in Jerusalem, and his ministry still ends with the return to Galilee. The one part of the angel's message Jesus alters is the reference to the "disciples" which he changes to "brothers" (Matt. 28:7, 10). In this case, the journey back to Galilee would be the necessary precursor to the broadening of the mission of his "brothers" to all the world (i.e. Matt. 28:19, πάντα τὰ ἔθνη).

### **3. Jesus' Appearances and Interpretation (Matthew 28:8–10, 16–20)**

Jesus' final commission to the disciples makes unprecedented claims about his own authority and omnipresence in their future ministry. These claims comprise Jesus' interpretation of the events of his life, death, and resurrection for his followers. However, this "Great Commission" and the appearance of Jesus at the tomb have implications for the way his followers are portrayed in Matthew as well.

The first meeting between the risen Jesus and his followers happens before the women leave the site of his tomb (Matt. 28:9–10). Jesus says nothing to the women about his resurrection, but only reiterates the command to report the message about meeting in Galilee. As mentioned above, Jesus refers to the disciples as "brothers" in Matt. 28:10. The reference indicates that Jesus views the disciples as fellow devotees of God. This detail will become more significant in light of Jesus' commission to these men a few verses later.

Once in Galilee with his followers, Jesus delivers the crowning statement of the chapter. He begins by asserting his God-given authority "in heaven and upon the earth" (Matt. 28:18, ἐδόθη μοι πᾶσα ἐξουσία ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ [τῆς] γῆς). This statement reiterates

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<sup>154</sup> France, *Matthew*, 1102.

what Jesus has already said in 11:27, “all things have been given to me by my father” (Πάντα μοι παρεδόθη ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς μου) but as with the resurrection announcements, God is not explicitly mentioned in Matt 28:18. In Matt. 11:27, the “recognition” (ἐπιγινώσκω) of Jesus and his revelatory prerogative is the focus of these statements (ὃ ἂν βούληται ὁ υἱὸς ἀποκαλύψει). Matthew 28 explains how Jesus’ authority will be worked out through the disciples among “all the nations.” The all-encompassing nature of this authority is such that none of the privileges previously reserved for God are now inaccessible to Jesus. Furthermore, God now gives Jesus authority in heaven and upon the earth. Therefore, Jesus will be the agent of God’s work in heaven and upon earth from this point onward (Matt. 28:18).

Matthew joins the assertion of Jesus’ authority and the outworking of the commission to his followers with the conjunction οὖν. This conjunction establishes the relationships between Jesus’ universal authority and his followers’ future work. As Hagner makes this connection he says “Jesus’ authority (Matt 28:18) and his presence (Matt 28:20) will empower his disciples to fulfill the commission he now gives them.”<sup>155</sup>

The remainder of Jesus’ command uses the fourfold repetition of the word “all” (Matt. 28:18–20) to signal Jesus’ “universal authority.”<sup>156</sup> There is nothing outside of the scope of his power and work. Jesus says that his work is to extend to “all nations” involving “all his teaching” and will be undergirded by his presence at “all times” (Matt. 28:19–20, πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ... πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν ... ἐγὼ μεθ’ ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος). France recognizes the significance of this closing of Matthew’s Gospel when he says, “they are to be *his* disciples, obeying *his* commandments, and sustained by *his* unending presence among them. This new international community will be *his* *ekklesia*

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<sup>155</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 886.

<sup>156</sup> France, *Matthew*, 1109.

because it is *he* who now holds all authority in heaven and on earth. . . . Most remarkably of all, the human Jesus of the hills of Galilee is not to be understood as the preacher and promoter of faith, but as himself its object.”<sup>157</sup>

Matthew’s inclusion of Matt. 28:20 adds the promise of Jesus’ presence to his claims to absolute authority. “If left to their own devices and strength, the task would be overwhelming. Yet they are not left alone . . . the risen, enthroned Jesus promises to be with them in their fulfillment of it, not intermittently but always.”<sup>158</sup> That is, Jesus tells the disciples that he will be a present assistance to his followers in their discipling and baptizing. In saying so, Jesus claims that he himself is omnipresent and thereby will support the work of ministry in the three-fold name.

Therefore, Jesus reveals that he himself is universally authoritative and omnipresent in the mission to which he calls his followers. That is, Jesus includes himself in the center of his own mission, and requires that future “disciples” be those that adhere to Jesus’ teaching, being baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus, Jesus explicitly defines what it means to be called a “disciple,” and what power would secure such belief in the mission of these men.

### **Summary of the Content of the Revelatory Experiences of Matthew 28**

Jesus’ resurrection is the final example of the intervention of God in Matthew’s narrative. The angel appears at the tomb as a divine emissary to announce the good news to the women, but does so not by appealing to God’s power in raising Jesus but Jesus’ authority in predicting his resurrection. In Galilee, Jesus’ commission to the eleven stresses the prominence of his own role in the ministry to which he calls his followers. With the repetition

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<sup>157</sup> France, *Matthew*, 1108.

<sup>158</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 889.

of “all” in Matt. 28:16–20, Matthew shows his reader that Jesus’ influence will spread throughout the world and his presence among his followers will be perpetually realized. Furthermore, Jesus’ presence with his followers as they “make disciples,” “baptize,” and “teach” denotes the role he plays in engendering reverences for himself in those to whom the disciples minister. Jesus is not sending his followers out simply as his representatives. He is personally assisting them in their task of making disciples of himself. In this way, God’s intervening and revelatory acts are embodied for believers in the person of Jesus. The witnesses’ responses to all the revelatory phenomena of Matthew 28 will be examined below.

### *Responses to the Revelatory Experiences of Matthew 28*

Mary Magdalene, the other Mary, the guards posted at the tomb, and the disciples are all present at one or more of the revelatory experiences of Matthew 28. In Matt. 28:1–10, the guards and the women witness the earthquake and descent of the angel. Later, the women at the tomb witness and speak to the angel and risen Jesus. Third, the disciples on the mount in Galilee are witnesses to the risen Jesus as he commissions them to minister to the nations. Matthew’s description of the responses of each of these groups has significant implications for the current project.

#### **1. The Guards and Women at the Tomb (Matthew 28:1–10)**

Matthew’s tomb scene compares the deception of the guards and the reverence of the women, both of whom witness the earthquake and descent of the angel. First, the guards that witness the descent of the angel “are shaken from fear and become as dead men” (Matt. 28:4, ἀπὸ δὲ τοῦ φόβου αὐτοῦ ἐσείσθησαν οἱ τηροῦντες καὶ ἐγενήθησαν ὡς νεκροί). Matthew’s irony is

conspicuous: the guards become like corpses and then fabricate a story, whereas Jesus becomes alive and tells the truth.<sup>159</sup> After the guards “become like dead men” the women approach and interact with the angel. The courage of the women highlights further irony—those armed with weapons and responsible for guarding the tomb are petrified with fear, whereas the women, although fearful themselves (Matt. 28:8), are able to interact with the angel.<sup>160</sup>

The juxtaposition of the guards and the women here is not accidental for Matthew. First, both parties initially experience the same phenomena and express fear. They respond negatively to the event and flee the scene to tell the Jewish authorities. The women “with fear and great joy” (Matt. 28:8, μετὰ φόβου καὶ χαρᾶς μεγάλης) flee the scene in obedience to the angel. The women’s response of reverence is confirmed when they see Jesus as they run to tell the disciples.<sup>161</sup> Jesus calls out to them, and the women respond with worship (Matt. 28:9, αἱ δὲ προσελθοῦσαι ἐκράτησαν αὐτοῦ τοὺς πόδας καὶ προσεκύνησαν αὐτῷ).<sup>162</sup> Thus, Matthew compares the incredulity of the guards and the belief of the women, illustrating how the revelatory event itself does not engender reverence for Jesus in the narrative.

## 2. The Role of Fear in Matthew

Fear is prominent in the first half of Matthew 28, in which the guards and the women all have fearful reactions to the phenomena they witness. The guards “tremble with fear” and the women flee the tomb “with great fear and joy” (Matt. 28:4, 8, ἀπὸ δὲ τοῦ φόβου αὐτοῦ ἐσείσθησαν οἱ τηροῦντες . . . μετὰ φόβου καὶ χαρᾶς μεγάλης). In the women’s case, both the

<sup>159</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 869.

<sup>160</sup> C. S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 689.

<sup>161</sup> W. Carter, *Matthew and the Margins* (London: T & T Clark, 2000), 1099 n. 24, seems to think Matthew’s women both already remembered and expected the resurrection. The angel’s announcement to them and their emotional response hardly seems to affirm Carter’s assertion.

<sup>162</sup> France, *Matthew*, 1102, notes that the women would normally be repulsed as they take hold of Jesus’ feet; this act perhaps illustrates their zeal for Jesus in this scene.

angel and Jesus begin by telling the women μή φοβεῖσθε (Matt. 28:5, 10). Matthew does not record the women's fear during the encounters with the angel or Jesus, but he mentions their "great fear" as they flee the tomb before talking to Jesus.

Matthew records twenty-one fearful responses in his Gospel, one-third of which occur in contexts where the fearing audience has an obedient or otherwise favorable response to the object of their fear. The other two-thirds of which contain disobedient or otherwise unfavorable responses to the object of their fear.<sup>163</sup> Accordingly, fear is not a positively- or negatively-charged emotion in Matthew's Gospel, but rather the response of characters in conjunction with their fear determines whether or not the character is favorably disposed to the object of their fear.

The guards and the women illustrate this well. Both manifest fear—their belief (so the women) and unbelief (so the guards) notwithstanding. Certainly, fear in Matthew is the appropriate response for interaction with preternatural powers. But fear itself indicates neither reverence nor unbelief for Matthew. Consequently, fear is also not antithetical to worship in Matthew. That is, one can experience fear and take part in worship at the same time, as do the women.

### **3. Worship and Doubt (Matthew 28:16–20)**

Matthew candidly explains the strange combination of "worship" and "doubt" when the disciples see Jesus (Matt. 28:17, αὐτὸν προσεκύνησαν, οἱ δὲ ἐδίστασαν). This Greek construction has caused a divide over translation, with some preferring to take the latter phrase as a partitive ("but some doubted") as others maintain "but they doubted." Once the

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<sup>163</sup> Favorable or believing: Matt. 1:20; 9:8; 17:6; 27:54; 28:5, 8, 10. Unfavorable or unbelieving: 2:22; 10:26, 28, 31; 14:5, 26, 27, 30; 21:26, 46; 25:25; 28:4. This figure includes instances in which characters are told not to fear, even if this is the only reference to fear in the passage (e.g., 1:20).

translational question is decided, commentators have pored over the theological implications—how can doubt and worship exist concurrently for Matthew?

Hagner argues the minority opinion for “but they doubted” and cites numerous instances in which a similar construction is not translated as a partitive.<sup>164</sup> However, the examples Hagner lists are not exact parallels to the construction in Matt. 28:17, in which the question is whether to differentiate or equate the subject of two proximate verbs. Taking his cues from the construction, Gnilka supports the majority opinion and points out, “Der griechische Text stellt gegenüber” to the extent that he expects to see a *μεν . . . δέ* clause, “aber dieses fehlt.”<sup>165</sup> He follows by saying the *οἱ δέ* “einen Personenwechsel voraussetzt” and stands parallel with *προσεκύνησαν*. Gnilka therefore renders the construction “some worship but some doubt” which understands both verbs to be partitives.<sup>166</sup> Ellis supports this reading when he says, “‘Doubt’ does not have sinister overtones of disbelief. . . . The resurrected Christ is not ‘objectivized’ and then rejected by some of his followers. Matthew speaks instead of irresolution and wavering.”<sup>167</sup>

One grammatical parallel that uses *προσκυνέω* with *διστάζω* is Matt. 14:31–32, in which Peter walks to Jesus on the water and hesitates. Jesus rebukes Peter, after which time they both climb in the boat “and the ones in the boat worshipped him” (*ὀλιγόπιστε, εἰς τί ἐδίστασας; . . . οἱ δὲ ἐν τῷ πλοίῳ προσεκύνησαν αὐτῷ*).<sup>168</sup> The above construction illustrates

<sup>164</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 884–85, cites 2:5; 4:20, 22; 14:17, 33; 15:34; 16:7, 14; 20:5, 31; 21:25; 22:19; 26:15; 26:67; 27:4, 21, 23; 28:15; Gnilka, *Matthäusevangelium 2*, 506 lays out the interpretive possibilities: “1. Alle Elf huldigen—alle zweifeln. 2. Alle Elf huldigen—einigen von ihnen zweifeln, 3. Einige von ihnen huldigen, einige zweifeln, 4. Die Elf huldigen—andere, die nicht zur Gruppe der Elf gehören, zweifeln.”

<sup>165</sup> Gnilka, *Matthäusevangelium 2*, 506.

<sup>166</sup> Gnilka, *Matthäusevangelium 2*, 506. F. W. Danker et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 252, says, “The subject [of *οἱ δέ*] is a subgroup of the apostles.”

<sup>167</sup> I. P. Ellis, “But Some Doubted,” *NTS* 14 (1968): 574–80, 577.

<sup>168</sup> The Evangelist does not state the object of these doubts. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 884–85, notes the following reasons for doubt that commentators have proposed: the disciples may doubt their particular expressions of worship in Jesus’ new resurrected form, whether or not Jesus will receive them back after

that the οἱ δὲ clause is distinguishable from that which precedes it because of the ἐν τῷ πλοίῳ phrase. Matthew seems to use προσεκύνησαν αὐτῷ as an action separate from Peter's earlier hesitation. Thus, οἱ δὲ ἐδίστασαν in Matt. 28:17 is best understood as a partitive.

Even given the above conclusion, the theological challenges of Matthew 28:17 still exist. Doubt lingers among *some* of his disciples even in the face of the risen Jesus. Therefore, this verse illustrates the uneasy compromise between reverence and doubt in Matthew.<sup>169</sup> Matthew's combination of worship and doubt in these two contexts (Matt. 14:31–33 and 28:17) depict the disciples' ongoing struggle between commitment to Jesus and withdrawal from him. And yet despite the existence of the disciples' doubts, the disciples are positively disposed toward Jesus and reverence him in worship. And the context moves on without comment to the focus of the passage discussed earlier in this chapter. Ellis sums it up by saying, "The emphasis is not on their subjective experience, which is wholly out of the picture, but in what Christ does with them."<sup>170</sup>

### **Conclusions to the Responses to the Revelatory Acts of God in Matthew 28**

First, Matthew 28 illustrates that revelatory acts of God are often the context that inspires reverence for Jesus especially when Jesus himself appears. Yet revelatory experiences themselves are not always decisive in the response they elicit. In the case of the guards and the women, both characters witness the same phenomena. The guards shake with fear and the women interact with the angel and leave in obedience to the angel in delivering the message.

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their disloyalties, or they may be doubting the identity of Jesus. He simply states that existence of these doubts in the presence of their risen Lord.

<sup>169</sup> A possible Synoptic parallel to this "doubtful worship" is in Luke in 24:41, ἔτι δὲ ἀπιστούντων αὐτῶν ἀπὸ τῆς χαρᾶς.

<sup>170</sup> Ellis, "Some Doubted," 577.



However, interaction with the risen Jesus is only experienced by Jesus' followers and does inspire reverence for Jesus in each circumstance.

Second, the disciples' mixed response to Jesus in Matt. 28:16–20 shows the candor with which Matthew approaches the followers of Jesus. Even in this final scene, the author does not see the Jesus movement through “rose colored glasses.” Instead, the scene recognizes the frailty of Jesus' disciples in a passing way, and then focuses on Jesus' authority and presence with them as their confidence for overcoming this frailty.

### *Matthew 28 in the Context of the Entire Gospel*

Of all the passages outside of Matthew 28 that are relevant to this discussion, perhaps the most relevant is Matt. 11:27. Hagner reflects the established tendency of scholars to notice the link between Matt. 28:18 and 11:27.<sup>171</sup> In each passage, Jesus claims to have been given “all authority” and “all things,” respectively (Matt. 28:18, ἐδόθη μοι πᾶσα ἐξουσία; 11:27, Πάντα μοι παρεδόθη). Thus, Jesus is the passive recipient of “all authority” and “all things.” The divine conferral of authority to Jesus sets Jesus apart in his relationship to God and ability to carry out God's will. In both passages, Jesus has exclusive authority to act on behalf of God in the world.

Jesus' statements in both contexts also reference Jesus' ability to aid others in becoming his followers. Matthew 11:27 says that the “acknowledgement” (ἐπιγινώσκω) of “the Son” is given to whoever Jesus wishes to give it (11:27). Similarly in Matt. 28:18–20, after Jesus claims to have been given all authority “in heaven and on earth,” Jesus says that his presence will remain with the disciples as they enlist others to become disciples of Jesus.

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<sup>171</sup> Luz, *Matthew* 8–20, 166; Evans, *Matthew*, 246; France, *Matthew*, 445; Hagner, *Matthew* 1–13, 319–20; Turner, *Matthew*, 303.

As Hagner says of 11:27, “what is in view in this context is revelation or the granting of the knowledge of the truth. . . . A similar statement is made in 28:18 in connection with the giving of the great commission.”<sup>172</sup> Jesus’ references to himself as “son” are explicit in relation to the Father.<sup>173</sup> What Matthew 11:27 and 28:18–20 make clear “above all is the uniqueness and special character of the relationship of Father and Son.”<sup>174</sup> Matthew 11:25–26 does not remove God from the revelatory setting of Matthew’s Gospel. On the contrary, Matthew says God reveals Jesus to Simon four chapters later. Matthew 11:25–27 does not abrogate the revelatory authority or activity of God, but rather brings Jesus into the “inner circle” where revelatory decisions are made and power is exercised.

Lastly, Matt. 11:27 and 28:18–20 portray a development in the way the text speaks about Jesus’ revelatory authority with respect to God. Matthew 11:27 states Jesus’ (newfound?) understanding of his own revelatory authority. God does not sit alone at the top of the revelatory hierarchy, but Jesus participates with God in granting humans the knowledge of himself. Matthew 28:18–20 may represent the final word in this regard. Matthew 28’s repeated use of “all” is a reference to Jesus’ transcendent authority and his imminent presence while these revelatory acts are enacted. Thus, Matthew’s Gospel illustrates the handing over of revelatory authority to Jesus, as Jesus’ followers are commissioned to go out and recruit new followers for him.

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<sup>172</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 320. P. Perkins, *Resurrection: New Testament Witness and Contemporary Reflection* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1984), 133 doubts the parallel saying, “there are no direct verbal parallels” between the two passages. She later says that 28:18–20 “has reversed any limits to Jesus’ authority.” However, it is difficult to know what Perkins finds “limiting” about Jesus’ universal power to reveal himself and God in 11:27.

<sup>173</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 164; Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 320.

<sup>174</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 165.

## Conclusion to the Revelatory Acts of God in Matthew

The revelatory acts of God in Matthew are vehicles of divine intervention and in nearly every case provide a context in which characters express newfound reverence for Jesus. The infancy narrative uses the revelatory dreams of Joseph and the magi to deliver Jesus from potential harm, all of which produce positive responses in the witnesses. The baptism has the same effect, as Jesus responds to the event not during the baptism pericope itself, but in the next account of Jesus' temptation in the desert. As Satan challenges Jesus to misuse his status as God's beloved Son, Jesus shows his resolve that his divine sonship is to be exercised for God's good pleasure, not Satan's.

The transfiguration includes the responses of the disciples, but their reactions indicate only marginally positive responses toward Jesus as a result of the event as they are rebuked for their "little faith" in the contexts subsequent to the event.<sup>175</sup> Matthew's crucifixion account offers an explicit example of a revelatory act of God producing reverence for Jesus. However, the declaration of the centurion and those with him that Jesus is "God's Son" goes beyond the content of the revelatory sign to which they respond. The tearing of the veil, earthquake, and resurrection of the "holy ones" do not proclaim Jesus' sonship as in the baptism or transfiguration. Therefore, as with the appearance of the star to the magi, one may infer that the revelatory signs alone are only part of what was required to produce such a response.

The revelatory act of God in the angel's appearance at the tomb does not produce reverence for Jesus in the soldiers, as the revelatory phenomena do for the soldiers at the crucifixion. On the other hand, the women visiting the tomb worship at Jesus' feet when they

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<sup>175</sup> E.g., the suggestion to build tents, fear, etc.

see him.<sup>176</sup> Here, Jesus refers to the disciples as “brothers” even though they are doubtful of him when they see him. Thus, the witnesses of Matthew 28’s revelatory events are mixed, though revelatory encounters with the risen Jesus are generally consistent in the positive responses they produce. That is, although Matthew is under no pretense about the faithfulness of Jesus’ followers, still the resurrection of Jesus seems to be the one place in which Matthean revelatory acts of God begin to produce a more unified response in the followers of Jesus, even if the disciples do not manifest unadulterated reverence for Jesus.

Several conclusions are appropriate following this research in Matthew:

1. **God’s revelatory acts in Matthew show a transfer of revelatory authority from God to Jesus.** “God is selective in his revelation,” has been used rightly to draw attention to the selectivity of God’s revelatory acts in Matthew’s Gospel.<sup>177</sup> However if the “all” statements of Matt. 28:18–20 are taken into account, the statement may be revised as “Jesus is selective in his revelation” instead, because the transfer of authority from God to Jesus is clear by the last chapter of the Gospel.
2. **The revelatory acts of God often compel reverence for Jesus.** Revelatory experiences in Matthew are much more effective for inspiring reverence for Jesus than Mark, Luke, or John. In only the soldiers’ response to the angel at the empty tomb does a character witness a revelatory event and become adversely affected by it. Therefore, these events are often, though not always, the stimulus for a favorable response to Jesus.
3. **Jesus’ parting command exhorts his followers to make disciples, with or without revelatory experiences.** And though Jesus here offers revelatory experiences to his followers in his appearances, his commission in Matt. 28:18–20 indicates that these revelatory

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<sup>176</sup> Of course, the resurrection experiences are the first in Matthew in which the appearance of Jesus himself is that which makes the event revelatory.

<sup>177</sup> Keener, *Matthew*, 702, was here commenting on Matt. 11:27.

experiences will not be what grows God’s kingdom. Jesus says that his eternal presence is *with those who proclaim him*, and thus the teaching of Jesus followers, not an experience with the risen Jesus, will stimulate the growth of the kingdom. As in the rest of the Gospel, revelatory acts of God come and go—some produce significant change while others are quickly forgotten. But Jesus’ “prevailing church” (Matt. 16:18) moves forward instead on the teaching about Jesus, as his enduring presence is with those preach about him.

## CHAPTER 3

# Revelatory Acts of God in Luke

Revelatory acts of God are important for the Third Evangelist as Luke includes a greater number of these accounts than any other Gospel. Several Lukan events can be categorized as “revelatory acts of God.”<sup>1</sup> This chapter analyzes (1) what is communicated (i.e., content) of each revelatory event, (2) the audience’s response to the content, and (3) the reaction of characters in the subsequent context of each revelatory experience in an effort to explore the role of these accounts for reverence to Jesus. First, a survey of religious experience in this Gospel will frame the discussion.

### *Statistical Analysis of Religious Experience in Luke*

The statistics below will show Luke’s preference for revelatory material and divine intermediaries when compared with the other Gospels. Religious experience in Luke comprises over one-quarter of the Gospel (28%).<sup>2</sup> That is, 320 of Luke’s 1,149 verses

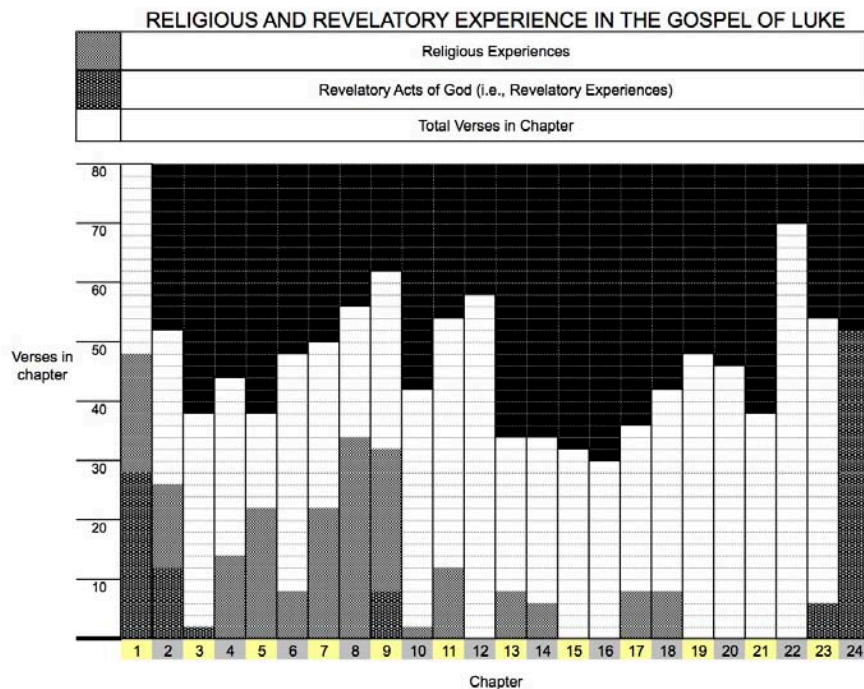
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<sup>1</sup> Gabriel’s appearance to Zechariah (Luke 1:8–23), the Annunciation (Luke 1:26–38), and the angelic appearance to the shepherds (Luke 2:8–20) will be grouped together in a section on the Birth narrative. Jesus’ baptism (Luke 3:21–22), the transfiguration (Luke 9:28–36), and the revelatory phenomena at the crucifixion (Luke 23:44–49) will each receive their own sections. The appearance of the angel at the tomb (Luke 24:1–12), Jesus’ appearance to the two men on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35), and Jesus’ appearance to the apostles and his ascension to heaven (Luke 24:36–53) will all be discussed in the same section on the resurrection. As in the Matthew chapter, this analysis of Luke’s Gospel will not include Jesus’ statement to the disciples in 10:18, in which he “sees Satan fall from heaven” because this statement occurs in discourse with the disciples and does not seem to depict the visionary experience itself. Accordingly, it is difficult to tell if Jesus is using a figure of speech, referring to an earlier vision he has, or is having the vision then as he speaks with the disciples. See S. J. Gathercole, “Jesus’ Eschatological Vision of the Fall of Satan: Luke 10,18 Reconsidered,” *ZNW* 94 (2003): 143–63, and J. V. Hills, “Luke 10:18—Who Saw Satan Fall?” *JSNT* 26 (1992): 25–40.

<sup>2</sup> See the *Methodology* section of the “Introduction” for a full explanation of the criteria used for including and excluding pericopae from these statistics.

convey religious experiences.<sup>3</sup> Figure 1 below illustrates the prominence and distribution of religious experiences in Luke:

**Figure 1. Distribution of Religious and Revelatory Experience in Luke**



Seventy-one percent of all Lukan religious experiences are found in the first half of the Gospel.<sup>4</sup> Luke’s departure from his Markan template, however, may speak more

<sup>3</sup> The 1,149 verse-count is tallied using E. Nestle, E. Nestle, and K. Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th ed. (American Bible Society, 1993), and does not count Luke 17:36 or 23:17, both missing in the aforementioned edition of the NT.

Lukan religious experience accounts are as follows: 1:8–23, Gabriel appears to Zechariah; 1:26–38, Gabriel appears to Mary; 1:39–45, Elizabeth “filled with spirit of holiness”; 1:67–79, Zechariah’s prophecy; 2:8–20, angels appear to shepherds; 2:22–35, Jesus revealed to Simeon by the Holy Spirit; 3:21–22, Jesus’ baptism; 4:1–13, Jesus’ temptation; 4:14–15, Jesus’ return in the “power of the spirit”; 4:38–39, Jesus heals Simon’s mother-in-law; 4:40–41, Jesus heals and exorcizes; 5:4–11, Jesus causes miraculous catch of fish; 5:12–16, Jesus heals the leper; 5:17–26, Jesus heals paralytic; 6:6–11, Jesus heals man with withered hand; 6:17–19, crowds touch Jesus for healing; 7:1–10, Jesus heals centurion’s servant; 7:11–17, Jesus raises Nain widow’s son; 7:18–23, Jesus heals; 8:22–25, Jesus calms sea; 8:26–39, Jesus exorcizes demoniac; 8:40–42, 49–56, Jesus raises Jairus’ daughter; 8:43–48, Jesus heals woman with issue of blood; 9:1–6, disciples exorcize and heal; 9:10–17, Jesus feeds 5,000; 9:28–36, Jesus is transfigured; 9:37–45, Jesus exorcizes foaming demon; 10:20–22, Jesus rejoices in the Holy Spirit; 11:14–26, Jesus exorcizes; 13:10–17, Jesus heals woman hunched over for 18 years; 14:1–6, Jesus heals man with dropsy; 17:11–19, Jesus heals ten lepers; 18:35–43, Jesus heals blind man; 23:44–49, three hours of darkness and the tearing of the veil; 24:1–12, angel appears to women at the tomb; 24:13–35, Jesus appears on the journey to Emmaus; 24:36–53, Jesus appears to disciples and ascends.

loudly than any similarities. Half of all religious experience accounts in Luke are initiated by non-human figures, either by God or his intermediaries.<sup>5</sup> Mark and Matthew have less interest in such figures and do more to highlight Jesus as the primary actor in religious experience accounts.<sup>6</sup> These numbers suggest Luke's preference for the revelatory (by definition, revelatory acts of God are those carried out by non-human actors) and provide the impetus for the present chapter.

*Revelatory Acts of God within the Structure of Luke*

Luke's structure contains the same geographical awareness of Matthew and Mark.<sup>7</sup> "The three gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke all share essential narrative structure . . . of an extensive ministry in Galilee, followed by a decisive journey south to Jerusalem, after which the climactic events take place in that city."<sup>8</sup> Thus, Luke makes little variation on the inclusion of three of the main revelatory acts of God in the Synoptics<sup>9</sup> and their geographical "fit" into his Gospel.<sup>10</sup> That is, Luke's baptism takes place in the prologue, the transfiguration near the junction of his Galilean ministry and journey to Jerusalem, and the crucifixion phenomena occur in Jerusalem.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This Lukan similarity to Mark and Matthew is common sense for most scholars, since Mark is widely thought to be the template for both Matthew's and Luke's Gospels.

<sup>5</sup> In Luke, 160 out of 320 religious experience verses (50%) feature non-human figures.

<sup>6</sup> In Mark, 40 out of 232 verses (18%) and in Matthew 79 out of 219 verses (36%) include non-human figures.

<sup>7</sup> His focus on Jerusalem as Jesus' city of destiny also illustrates his emphasis on Jesus' messiahship

<sup>8</sup> Noted from private correspondence with R. T. France before his death in February, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> I.e., the baptism, transfiguration, and phenomena at the crucifixion.

<sup>10</sup> Other than making Jerusalem a more prominent feature in the plot (Luke 9:51).

<sup>11</sup> The only difference one can point to is that commentators believe the Lukan transfiguration takes place before Jesus' transition toward Jerusalem (which begins at Luke 9:51) whereas the Markan and Matthean transfigurations take place after Jesus' southward movement begins (Mark 8:22 and Mt 16:21). Presumably, Luke's insertion of the travel narrative, which takes place as Jesus journeys toward Jerusalem, is the reason for this alteration.



Similar to Matthew, Luke bookends his Gospel with several revelatory acts of God making the beginning and end the phenomenological high points of the narrative. Perhaps the main difference between Luke's Gospel and Matthew or Mark is the emphasis Luke places on Jesus as God's messiah as he makes Jerusalem the centerpiece of the narrative. This accords with Luke's "preoccupation with Jerusalem as the city of destiny for Jesus and the pivot for the salvation of mankind. . . . Unlike the compositions of the other evangelists, the Lucan Gospel begins and ends in Jerusalem."<sup>12</sup> Thus, both the geography and structure of Luke reinforce Jesus' role as the fulfillment of God's salvation. In other words, the goal of Jesus' life and ministry is to demonstrate that he is Israel's messiah, a theme central to the revelatory acts of God concerning Jesus in Luke's Gospel.

## Revelatory Acts of God in Luke

In demonstrating a preference for revelatory material, Luke presents the clearest picture of the way God's revelatory acts contribute to the characters' responses to Jesus. This chapter will analyze the content, corresponding responses, and subsequent context of the birth narrative, baptism, transfiguration, crucifixion, and resurrection scenes. This chapter will show that Lukan revelatory events have some correspondence with characters' reverence to Jesus, but these accounts do not engender such responses in every case. The sections below will examine the relationships between these revelatory acts of God in Luke and the way characters respond to Jesus.

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<sup>12</sup> J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I–IX*, vol. 28, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 164–65.

## Gabriel and the Angelic Chorus (Luke 1:8–23, 26–38, 2:8–20)

The revelatory acts of God in the first two chapters of Luke present a mixed picture of the effectiveness of revelatory experience for producing reverence for Jesus.<sup>13</sup> As Zechariah, Mary, and the shepherds in the field receive notice from heaven about the coming of John and Jesus, only Mary and the shepherds have entirely positive responses, whereas Zechariah is chastised for his “unbelief” (Luke 1:20, ἐπίστευσας).<sup>14</sup>

### *Content of the Angelic Revelatory Experiences*

#### **1. Principal Agents and Divine Validation**

The three revelatory acts of God of the Lukan birth narrative all feature the appearances of angels, and add references to God as a way to emphasize the divine origin and imprimatur of the events.<sup>15</sup> In the case of Zechariah and Mary, a principal agent of God visits them (Luke 1:19, ἐγώ εἰμι Γαβριήλ ὁ παρεστηκώς ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ). In the case of the shepherds, an angel followed by a “multitude of heavenly host” with “glory of the Lord” initiate the experience (Luke 2:9, 13).<sup>16</sup> These divine agents announce the coming of the forerunner of Jesus and Jesus himself.<sup>17</sup>

In the first two revelatory experiences, “Luke identifies ‘the angel of the Lord’ as the angel of the prophecy of seventy weeks in Daniel 9, Gabriel . . . one of the three

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<sup>13</sup> J. B. F. Miller, *Convinced that God has Called Us: Dreams, Visions, and the Perception of God’s Will in Luke-Acts*, BI 85 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 109, calls the visionary material of Luke 1 the “most complicated” in the Gospel.

<sup>14</sup> For an analysis of the John-Jesus parallel in Luke 1–2 see, K. A. Kuhn, “The Point of the Step-Parallelism in Luke 1–2,” *NTS* 47 (2001): 38–49.

<sup>15</sup> F. S. Spencer, *The Gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008), 101.

<sup>16</sup> Gabriel’s appearance to Zechariah uses the same wording as elsewhere in Luke-Acts, to “denote various epiphanies and appearances” (Luke 24:34; Acts 2:3; 7:2, 26, 30, 35; 9:17; 13:31; 16:9; 26:16). See Fitzmyer, *Luke I–IX*, 324.

<sup>17</sup> For a discussion on the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus, see Brown, *Birth*, 282–85.

angels specifically named in the OT.”<sup>18</sup> Although the announcement concerns two different people (i.e., John and Jesus), Gabriel’s participation in the event produces the same effect: an intensification of the message that is being delivered. Biblical literature mentions Gabriel only two other times, in Dan 8:16 and 9:21.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, his participation in the Lukan birth narrative suggests the significance of these announcements to Zechariah and Mary especially.

Although Gabriel does not appear to the shepherds, the sheer number of angels (Luke 2:13, πλῆθος στρατιᾶς) and the mention of the presence of God’s glory (Luke 2:9, δόξα κυρίου περιέλαμψεν αὐτούς) both increase the gravity of the third experience of the Gospel.<sup>20</sup> Fitzmyer notes in this case that glory is “associated with Yahweh’s perceptible presence to his people.”<sup>21</sup>

Gabriel’s use of his credentials as the basis by which the messages should be believed is also a noteworthy feature of the first two angelic appearances (Luke 1:8–23, 26–38). Gabriel’s appearance to Mark describes the angel as “sent from God” (Luke 1:26, ἀπεστάλη ὁ ἄγγελος Γαβριὴλ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ), which authorizes the message he would soon deliver. This detail offers a crucial point-of-reference for understanding the weight of Gabriel’s announcement.

When Gabriel responds to Zechariah’s doubts, he uses his high position in God’s entourage to substantiate the truth of his message: ἐγὼ εἰμι Γαβριὴλ ὁ παρεστηκὼς ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἀπεστάλην λαλῆσαι πρὸς σὲ καὶ εὐαγγελίσασθαί σοι ταῦτα (Luke 1:18–19). Gabriel’s response is not one of self-aggrandizement—

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<sup>18</sup> Fitzmyer, *Luke I–IX*, 327.

<sup>19</sup> Brown, *Birth*, 270.

<sup>20</sup> Language of epiphany is used, “the visible manifestation of the power of God certifying the presence of God himself in the coming of this child.” Green, *Luke*, 132, notes the characteristic use of ἐφίστημι (2:9) in epiphanic accounts (also used in Acts 12:7; 13:11). The verb περιλάμπω is also used, appearing only in this event and in Acts 26:13 in the New Testament.

<sup>21</sup> Fitzmyer, *Luke I–IX*, 409, cites Exod. 16:7, 10; 24:17; 40:34; Ps. 63:3; cf. Num. 12:8.

rather, he bases his trustworthiness on his unfettered access. That is, Gabriel establishes the authenticity of his message based on his relation to God.

Gabriel's response to Zechariah is relevant to the current study in the following ways: First, Gabriel's statement shows that his proximity to God establishes the reliability of his report. Angels that come from God can reveal the things of God. Gabriel even goes further by saying that he was "sent by God" to bring the message to Zechariah (Luke 1:19, ἀπεστάλην λαλῆσαι πρὸς σέ καὶ εὐαγγελίσασθαί σοι ταῦτα). Gabriel's message should be trusted because Gabriel himself has divine access.

Second, Gabriel's response to Zechariah shows that revelatory acts of God aim to engender a favorable response in witnesses. Because Zechariah is chastised for his negative response in the face of such a credible report, Luke's account makes clear that revelatory events such as these are intended to produce the proper response in Luke. In contrast with the revelatory experiences above, Luke's Gospel contains accounts in which demons use divine titles for Jesus (e.g., Luke 8:28, τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, Ἰησοῦ υἱὲ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου;), such accounts are neither used to validate Jesus nor to engender reverence to him. Rather, these demonic reports only echo what divine agents or God himself have already affirmed. Therefore, the difference between the revelatory acts of God in the birth narrative and Lukan exorcism accounts highlights the aim of these events within the birth narrative to engender reverence for Jesus among the characters that witness them. In other words, revelatory experiences play a particular role in the Lukan birth narrative—specifically calling characters to believe in the message revealed about Jesus.

In sum, Luke's use of angels, the added stress Luke gives to the rank before God (so Gabriel) or the way they bear the glory of God (so the angelic multitude), and the purpose of their appearance all show that these events are used to indicate the

gravity of the situation and the importance that characters respond positively to God’s revelatory work.

## 2. Special Roles in God’s Redemptive Plan

Also common to all three revelatory acts of God is the unique role that John and Jesus have in God’s redemptive plan. Gabriel says John will be filled with the Holy Spirit *in utero* (Luke 1:15, πνεύματος ἁγίου πλησθήσεται ἔτι ἐκ κοιλίας μητρὸς αὐτοῦ) as he serves as the forerunner of “the Lord” (Luke 1:16–17, καὶ πολλοὺς τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ ἐπιστρέψει ἐπὶ κύριον τὸν θεὸν αὐτῶν. καὶ αὐτὸς προελεύσεται ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ ἐν πνεύματι καὶ δυνάμει Ἡλίου). That is, John is both commissioned and enabled to be the one who prepares the way for God’s redeemer.

Gabriel calls Jesus God’s “Son” twice in Mary’s presence (Luke 1:32, 35, υἱὸς ὑψίστου κληθήσεται . . . τὸ γεννώμενον ἅγιον κληθήσεται υἱὸς θεοῦ). Gabriel’s title for Jesus is issued in the context of Jesus’ eternal reign upon David’s throne (Luke 1:32–33, δώσει αὐτῷ κύριος ὁ θεὸς τὸν θρόνον Δαυὶδ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ, καὶ βασιλεύσει ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον Ἰακώβ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας καὶ τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἔσται τέλος). Thus, Jesus’ status in relation to God and his perpetual role in God’s redemptive program are both emphasized by Luke.

The angelic host in Luke 2:8–20 is less explicit in the report they give about Jesus. However, they still hail Jesus as “savior” (σωτήρ) and “Christ the Lord” (χριστὸς κύριος) in Luke 2:11. The term “savior” is used for God in Luke 1:49 (ἠγαλλίασεν τὸ πνεῦμά μου ἐπὶ τῷ θεῷ τῷ σωτήρῳ μου) and “Christ *the Lord*” may be

a similar title in which Jesus is referred to in the same terms as God.<sup>22</sup> With either title, Jesus clearly has a unique place in God’s plan as the redeemer of Israel.

### **Summary of the Content of the Revelatory Events Luke 1-2**

Each revelatory act of God in Luke’s birth narrative emphasizes the credibility of the messenger and the positive response these messengers aim to produce in Luke’s Gospel. Also, the content of these events focuses on Jesus as a central figure in God’s plan of redemption, as other figures will recognize Jesus as God’s Son as well.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the revelatory acts of God in Luke’s birth narrative, delivered via his principal agent, are an effort to cause the recipient(s) to reverence Jesus as God’s instrument of salvation for Israel. However, do those revelatory acts accomplish their intended effect?

#### *Responses of Zechariah, Mary, and the Shepherds*

Fear and joy are prevalent in Luke’s Gospel, and both have a role in the revelatory events of the birth narrative.<sup>24</sup> The most prominent emotion expressed during these revelatory acts of God is fear, exhibited in the responses of Zechariah, Mary, and the shepherds.<sup>25</sup> Zechariah, Mary, and the shepherds of Luke 1–2 all have the same fearful response to the angels (Luke 1:12, 29–30; 2:9–10, φόβος ἐπέπεσεν ἐπ’ αὐτόν . . . ἡ δὲ ἐπὶ τῷ λόγῳ διεταράχθη . . . καὶ εἶπεν ὁ ἄγγελος αὐτῇ· μὴ φοβοῦ,

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<sup>22</sup> See Hurtado, *Lord*, 108–18, for his discussion on the way this term developed prior to the writing of the Gospels in the letters of Paul.

<sup>23</sup> Luke 4:3, Satan: εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ; 4:9, Satan: εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ; 4:41, demon: σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ; 8:28, demoniac: Ἰησοῦ υἱὲ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου; 9:35, Sanhedrin: σὺ οὖν εἶ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ.

<sup>24</sup> K. P. De Long, *Surprised by God: Praise Responses in the Narrative of Luke-Acts*, BZNW 166 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 135–80, offers an extended analysis of joy and praise in Luke’s birth narrative.

<sup>25</sup> M. Coleridge, *The Birth of the Lukan Narrative*, JSNTSupp 88 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 28–127, sees the scenes of chapter 1 as a process of “introducing, exploring, and interpreting” the faith of Zechariah and Mary.

Μαριάμ . . . καὶ ἐφοβήθησαν φόβον μέγαν).<sup>26</sup> Zechariah’s fear “is expected in this context, laden as it is with elements signifying divine visitation,”<sup>27</sup> and this observation can be made for all three events.<sup>28</sup> Fear is a frequent emotion in Luke’s Gospel. Some form of “fear” (φόβος or φοβέω) occurs twenty-eight times in Luke, and the term does not seem to be reserved for any one context in particular.<sup>29</sup> However, of these twenty-eight occurrences, thirteen occur in contexts of revelatory or miraculous experience and are the exclusive setting in which this term is used in the first eight chapters. Accordingly, all fifteen occurrences of “fear” that have nothing to do with revelatory or religious experience occur from chapters 9–24. This observation suggests that “fearful” encounters with the divine are formative for plot development early in Luke’s Gospel. And these fearful responses to divine emissaries in Luke 1–2 are replaced by the fearful response to Jesus in Luke 3–8.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Miller, *Convinced*, 114 n. 8–9, shows how the LXX uses language of fear and commands not to fear.

<sup>27</sup> Green, *Luke*, 72; Fitzmyer, *Luke I–IX*, 325, adds that Zechariah’s fear is “possibly an allusion to Dan 10:7. In the OT alarm and fear are the standard reactions to heavenly epiphanies.”

<sup>28</sup> Brown, *Birth*, 370, notes, “With both Zechariah (1:12) and Mary (1:30) there is mention of fear before an awesome divine intervention.”

<sup>29</sup> Ten of these occurrences are the command not to fear (μή + a form of φοβέω). Luke 1:12–13 (x2), Zechariah fears at the sight of Gabriel and is told not to fear; Luke 1:30, Gabriel tells Mary not to fear; Luke 1:50, Psalm quoted pronouncing mercy on “those who fear him”; Luke 1:64, fear regarding the significance of John; Luke 2:9–10 (x3) shepherds “fear a great fear” before the angels and are commanded by angels not to fear; Luke 5:9, Jesus’ commands disciples not to fear after the miraculous catch of fish; Luke 5:25, crowds “filled with fear” after healing of the paralytic; 7:15, all the people fear after resurrection of the boy in Nain; Luke 8:24, calming of the sea; Luke 8:35, 37, people of the city feared after the exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac; Luke 8:49, Jesus commands the synagogue ruler not to fear before the resurrection of his daughter; Luke 9:45, the disciples were afraid to ask Jesus questions; Luke 12:4–7 (x5), “fear him who has authority to throw you into hell”; Luke 12:32, Jesus encouragement not to fear that the “flock” will not receive the kingdom; Luke 18:1, 4, parable of the unjust judge, “not fearing God nor man”; Luke 19:19, parable of talents in which third servant fears the austerity of the master; Luke 20:19, scribes and chief priests fear the people; Luke 21:10, reference to “terrors” and signs in the heavens; Luke 21:25, people lost heart from fear and expectation of the world to come; Luke 22:1, chief priests and scribes fear the people; Luke 23:39, thief to the other, “do you not fear God?”

<sup>30</sup> Although these encounters with Jesus clearly have a theophanic dimension, this thesis does not examine these as revelatory accounts in themselves, because the earthly Jesus is a human agent of God and no other visionary or prophetic elements exist in the passages. One may say that these accounts typify the revelatory accounts, but making a case for this assertion goes beyond the bounds of this project.

However, fearful responses also do not indicate a positive or negative response. Zechariah's reaction is a negative example and doubts about the prophecy Gabriel delivers (ἐγὼ γάρ εἰμι πρεσβύτες καὶ ἡ γυνή μου προβεβηκυῖα ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις αὐτῆς).<sup>31</sup> Certainly, Zechariah's response is not ultimately negative, in that he ends up believing the message Gabriel relays and receives his speech back after John is born (Luke 1:64). Yet his initial response is not commendable in the Gospel because he receives Gabriel's reproof.

Mary also fears as a result of Gabriel's visitation and even asks a similar question of the angel (Luke 1:34). Mary's question, however, is not like that of "skeptical Zechariah, [who] wants hard proof so he can 'know' if the angel's word is true. . . . Mary simply . . . asks how this unusual birth 'will be.' Her query is about process, not proof."<sup>32</sup> Instead, her final response is favorable toward the message (Luke 1:38, ἰδοὺ ἡ δούλη κυρίου· γένοιτό μοι κατὰ τὸ ῥῆμά σου).

The shepherds have no interaction with the angel or the chorus other than fear. Luke 2:15, 20 are unequivocal in the positive response these shepherds show, even emphasizing their response of obedience to the angels and reverence for God (οἱ ποιμένες ἐλάλουν πρὸς ἀλλήλους· διέλθωμεν δὴ ἕως Βηθλέεμ καὶ ἴδωμεν τὸ ῥῆμα τοῦτο τὸ γεγονός· ὃ ὁ κύριος ἐγνώρισεν ἡμῖν . . . οἱ ποιμένες δοξάζοντες καὶ αἰνοῦντες τὸν θεὸν ἐπὶ πᾶσιν οἷς ἤκουσαν καὶ εἶδον καθὼς ἐλαλήθη πρὸς αὐτούς). "Far from questioning the angelic message, they presume that what has been announced has already come to pass."<sup>33</sup>

These fearful reactions of Zechariah, Mary, and the shepherds followed by their specific responses to the revelations illustrate (1) that fear in Luke is no indication of

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<sup>31</sup> M. Wolter, *Das Lukasevangelium*, HNT 5 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 82, says, "Der Engel qualifiziert die Bitte um ein Zeichen und deren Begründung (V. 18) als Ausdruck des Unglaubens (20b) und belegt Zacharias zur Strafe mit Stummheit." De Long, *Surprised*, 175.

<sup>32</sup> Spencer, *Gospel*, 104.

<sup>33</sup> Miller, *Convinced*, 148.



a character's response to Jesus and (2) that these revelatory acts of God have varying effectiveness in engendering a proper response in those who witness them. Green notices as much when he says, "Luke records in each case of angelic visitation the . . . response of the recipient. Zechariah expresses unbelief (1:18, 20). Mary embraces God's aim. . . ."<sup>34</sup> The shepherds respond in action, by leaving their sheep to find Jesus. Then they confirm the words of the angels, tell many people and glorify God (Luke 2:17–18, 20).<sup>35</sup> These varying responses to the revelatory phenomena make the role of Lukan revelatory acts of God for engendering reverence for Jesus an open question right at the outset of the Gospel.

### *Subsequent Context*

Luke provides more information about how Zechariah, Mary, and the shepherds respond after these revelatory acts of God that will now be discussed. Mary's positive response throughout the birth narrative is mentioned by Elizabeth in Luke 1:45 and stands in contrast to Zechariah's negative response in Luke 1:18.<sup>36</sup> Mary then reflects on the implications of her revelatory experience with Gabriel both for herself (Luke 1:46–49) and for Israel (1:49–55).<sup>37</sup> Her response shows a level of reflection that goes beyond what Gabriel's message to her contains. Spencer writes, "Mary's growth in

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<sup>34</sup> Green, *Luke*, 137.

<sup>35</sup> Interestingly, in these three "case studies" it is the "lowly" Mary and shepherds that respond positively, while the priest serving in the Jerusalem temple responds with unbelief and is judged. (Note the two references to Mary humble status in the use of ἡ δούλη (1:38) and ταπεινῶσιν (1:48). Also, Luke 2:8 does not even use the proper term for shepherd, ποιμήν, but "field dwellers," ἀγραυλοῦντες.)

<sup>36</sup> Evans, *Luke*, 170. Miller, *Convinced*, 110–11 n. 4, sees a disparity between what Mary and Zechariah say in the Magnificat and the Benedictus and what the narrator of the Gospel says about Jesus. He says, "the interpretations of both Mary and Zechariah establish expectations that must be reshaped in the course of Luke's narrative. . . . [because they] attribute actions to God that are not carried out in the story." Thus, Miller assumes that actions attributed to God by Mary and Zechariah that are not explicitly referenced in the rest of Luke-Acts are a "problem" (his word) for Luke's Gospel.

<sup>37</sup> For a detailed analysis of both Mary's song and Zechariah's prophecy, see U. Mittmann-Richert, *Magnifikat und Benedictus*, WUNT 2.90 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), who analyzes the Old Testament background and basic components of the two passages, along with considerations of the genre of the two passages.

understanding . . . takes a quantum leap with her celebratory prophetic outburst.”<sup>38</sup> Yet, Coleridge’s astute observation goes further, “God himself is not addressed. . . . The mode of address is horizontal rather than vertical. This is because the stress of the hymn is upon human recognition of God.”<sup>39</sup> And then even after the visitation by the shepherd in Luke 2, Mary “keeps these words in her heart” presumably in a similar manner of reflecting on the meaning of the vision of the shepherds (Luke 2:19, ἡ δὲ Μαριάμ πάντα συνετήρει τὰ ῥήματα ταῦτα συμβάλλουσα ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτῆς). These revelatory events are very effective for causing her to reflect positively on how God is blessing his people in Jesus. “Mary’s Magnificat is significant . . . because it reveals her perception of God’s will in the wake of her visionary experience.”<sup>40</sup>

Gabriel’s punishment on Zechariah persists until John is born. Luke 1:22 tells about his response as he left the temple unable to speak. The text shows that he gestures what happens to the crowd, but gives no indication of his response to it (Luke 1:22, ἐξελθὼν δὲ οὐκ ἐδύνατο λαλῆσαι αὐτοῖς, καὶ ἐπέγνωσαν ὅτι ὀπτασίαν ἐώρακεν ἐν τῷ ναῷ). Later, however, when John is born Zechariah insists that he be named John, showing his obedience to Gabriel’s command (Luke 1:62–63, ἐνένευον δὲ τῷ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ τὸ τί ἂν θέλοι καλεῖσθαι αὐτό. καὶ αἰτήσας πινακίδιον ἔγραψεν λέγων· Ἰωάννης ἐστὶν ὄνομα αὐτοῦ. καὶ ἐθαύμασαν πάντες).<sup>41</sup> After this point, Zechariah is filled with the Holy Spirit and issues a prophecy going well beyond what the angel said to him in that the prophecy is about both Jesus and Zechariah’s son, John (Luke 1:67–79).<sup>42</sup> Therefore, Zechariah’s character rebounds in Luke 1 showing that his final stance toward Gabriel, his son John, and Jesus is entirely positive and even

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<sup>38</sup> Spencer, *Gospel*, 105; Brown, *Birth*, 356.

<sup>39</sup> Coleridge, *Birth*, 88.

<sup>40</sup> Miller, *Convinced*, 129.

<sup>41</sup> Brown, *Birth*, 370, says, “His first use of speech is appropriate.”

<sup>42</sup> C. F. Evans, *Saint Luke*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: SCM, 2008), 181–82.

shows a level of understanding that balances the revelatory experience earlier in the chapter.<sup>43</sup>

The above observations from the subsequent context show that these revelatory acts of God continue to affect characters in Luke well after the events themselves are recorded. Even Zechariah, first responding negatively to Gabriel's message, returns to the narrative with overflowing joy and praise for the message he heard, after joy was ascribed to him by Gabriel during the vision in Luke 1:14.<sup>44</sup> Neither Mary nor Zechariah specifically mention Gabriel's appearance in the subsequent context, and yet both reflect positively on the things told them.

#### *Conclusion to Revelatory Acts of God in Luke 1–2*

Gabriel and the angelic chorus deliver important information to Zechariah, Mary, and the shepherds, and the significance of their messages is conveyed by their appearance in the first place and also their status before God. This status before God is used to credit the messages they bear and engender reverence for the content of the message (i.e., the coming of John and Jesus). However, responses to the angels are mixed, with Mary and the shepherds exhibiting positive responses and Zechariah chastised for his negative response. The presence of fear is not a predictor of a positive or negative response, and Zechariah does later respond positively to what the angel says to him. Later in Luke 1, both Zechariah and Mary show a greater level of reflection on their revelatory experiences than the events themselves convey.

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<sup>43</sup> For extended discussions and commentary on Luke 1:67–79, see Brown, *Birth*, 370–74. Specifically on the implications of Luke 1:78, see Gathercole, *Preexistent*, 231–42.

<sup>44</sup> De Long, *Surprised*, 175.

## Jesus' Baptism by John (Luke 3:21–22)

Luke's account of Jesus' baptism contains many of the same features as the other Synoptics, although it reformulates these and identifies Jesus with "all the people" being baptized (Luke 3:21, Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν τῷ βαπτισθῆναι ἅπαντα τὸν λαὸν καὶ Ἰησοῦ βαπτισθέντος).<sup>45</sup> However, the people being baptized with Jesus do not seem to be witnesses to the visionary or auditory phenomena. The paragraphs below will analyze the (1) content of this revelatory act of God, (2) discuss Jesus as the lone witness of the phenomena, and (3) note any response of Jesus in the subsequent context.

### *Content of the Baptismal Revelatory Experience*

#### **1. Heaven Anticipates the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:21–22)**

Lukan redaction suggests that the opening of heaven is an anticipation of the giving of the Spirit.<sup>46</sup> Similar to Mark, who grammatically pairs the heavenly schism with the descending dove with two present participles, Luke uses aorist infinitives to link the two signs and his redaction of the Markan account implies that the Third Gospel emphasizes the descent of the dove more than the previous two Gospels.<sup>47</sup>

Luke's emphasis on the Holy Spirit shows up in two ways: First, Luke adds ἅγιον to Mark's τὸ πνεῦμα (Mark 1:10), thus pointing to the divine nature of the descending Spirit. Neither Luke's nor Mark's reference to God's Spirit is altogether common in Palestinian Jewish or non-Jewish Second Temple texts. Levison cites Isa. 63:10–11 and Ps. 51:13 as the only references in the Hebrew Bible to "Holy Spirit"

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<sup>45</sup> J. Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20*, vol. 35a, WBC (Waco: Word Books, 1989), 158–60, Luke, although preferring Mark over Matthew, "almost totally reformulated his Markan source."

<sup>46</sup> Luke's opening of heaven uses the same verb as Matthew (ἀνοίγω). Keck, "Spirit," 59.

<sup>47</sup> Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20*, 161.

and Marshall notes the idiosyncratic Markan τὸ πνεῦμα.<sup>48</sup> By adding ἅγιον to Mark’s τὸ πνεῦμα, Luke makes clear that the *divine* Spirit is the one that descends upon Jesus.

However, clarifying Mark’s wording is not the most compelling explanation for why Luke added ἅγιον. The immediate context of Mark’s baptism uses ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ when describing the ministry that Jesus would have in the future (Mark 1:8, ἐγὼ ἐβάπτισα ὑμᾶς ὕδατι, αὐτὸς δὲ βαπτίσει ὑμᾶς ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ). Mark’s language was not confused, then, about τὸ πνεῦμα in Mark 1:10. Instead, Luke’s inclusion of ἅγιον at least underscores the divine identity of the Spirit. As explained above, the first sign of this revelatory act of God —the parting of the heavens—is included as a signal of God’s impending presence. The descent of the spirit as a dove also indicates that God is present at the baptism. As important as Gabriel and his angels are, they still do not carry the weight that God does in revelatory experience. Luke’s emphasis on the divine identity of the Spirit accentuates this point.

Second and more importantly, Luke also emphasizes the role of the Spirit at the baptism by lengthening the description of the Spirit’s appearance and descent. This description is more drawn out than either of the other Synoptics, “The Holy Spirit descended in bodily form as a dove . . .” (Luke 3:22, καταβῆναι τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον σωματικῶς εἶδει ὡς περιστερὰν . . .).<sup>49</sup> Luke’s addition of “in bodily form” (σωματικῶς

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<sup>48</sup> See J. R. Levison, *The Spirit in First Century Judaism*, AGAJU 29 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 65, and Marshall, *Luke*, 152; Levison, *Spirit*, 65–76, cites the *Wisdom of Solomon*, Greek Danielic literature, and *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* as examples of the growing use of “holy spirit” in literature from the first centuries BCE–CE. Thus, although both Luke’s and Mark’s references to the Spirit are conspicuous, Luke’s appears at a time when “holy spirit” was an increasingly popular term. Keck, “Spirit,” 59–60, cites *1 En.* 41:1 as an example, but most of his other examples are from Hebrew or Aramaic texts.

Perhaps ambiguity arising from the simplicity of τὸ πνεῦμα explains why Luke would be interested in clarifying Mark’s terminology. The *Genesis Apocryphon* 20:17, 20, 29, although an Aramaic text, contains a segment in which “the Spirit” describes a demonic spirit that God sends to Pharaoh (Keck, “Spirit,” 59).

<sup>49</sup> Commentators have long queried the importance of the Spirit’s description. As mentioned earlier, Davis and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 331–34, list sixteen interpretive options drawn throughout history to explain the significance of the spirit *as a dove*. However, as Green writes, “no symbolic equation of Spirit and dove has been found in literature earlier than or contemporaneous with the Gospels” (Green, *Luke*, 187). This researcher finds no conclusive

εἶδει) seems to emphasize “the concrete nature of the experience”<sup>50</sup> and that the descent of the Holy Spirit for Luke “was seen . . . by Jesus.”<sup>51</sup> The increased verbal attention given to the account of the Holy Spirit reveals Luke’s overall interest in Holy Spirit empowerment. As Luke adds extra detail about the Spirit, he highlights the significance of the revelatory act that is taking place.<sup>52</sup>

## 2. God’s Special Son (Luke 3:22)<sup>53</sup>

Earlier chapters discuss the possible background and meaning of “Son of God.” The paragraphs below will employ the context of Luke’s Gospel to investigate how Luke might be using this title differently than either Mark or Matthew. Luke 3:22 distinguishes Jesus as God’s special Son from believers who would later be called “Sons of the Most High” (Luke 6:35).<sup>54</sup> The designation of Jesus as divine “Son”

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evidence for any particular allusion and is inclined toward the opinion that there is no substantive, theological significance to the Holy Spirit’s appearance *as a dove* in the Lukan narrative. See D. L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, BECNT 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 339.

<sup>50</sup> Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, 338.

<sup>51</sup> Marshall, *Luke*, 152.

<sup>52</sup> A second parallel with the descent of the dove in Luke-Acts is more of a useful analogy than it is a textual allusion. Acts 2:2–3 depicts a similar type of event to the baptism phenomena, but is not explicitly foreshadowed at the baptism, as is Luke 4:18–19. Acts 2:2–3, which reads καὶ ἐγένετο ἄφνω ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ . . . καὶ ὤφθησαν αὐτοῖς διαμεριζόμεναι γλῶσσαι ὡσεὶ πυρὸς καὶ ἐκάθισεν ἐφ’ ἓνα ἕκαστον αὐτῶν, καὶ ἐπλήσθησαν πάντες πνεύματος ἁγίου καὶ ἤρξαντο λαλεῖν ἑτέραις γλώσσαις καθὼς τὸ πνεῦμα ἐδίδου. . . . Unlike the baptism account, the ἐφ’ in Acts 2 describes the action of the γλῶσσαι ὡσεὶ πυρὸς not the πνεύματος ἁγίου. However, there are similarities in the content of each revelatory experience that speaks to the usefulness of Acts 2 in understanding Luke’s baptism account. That is, both passages mention “heaven” being the source of the “gift” (Luke 3:21, ἀνεῳχθήσαν τὸν οὐρανόν; Acts 2:2, ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ). Each passage has God sending his Spirit to those in need on Earth. Also, both Luke 3 and Acts 2 prominently feature the Holy Spirit (cf. Luke 3:22 and Acts 2:4). Lastly, Luke 3 and Acts 2 mention a specific action flowing out of this coming of the Holy Spirit (cf. Luke 4:1 and Acts 2:4). The purpose of this comparison is not to say that Luke had his Pentecost event in mind as he wrote the baptism. Rather, this comparison illustrates that the Lukan baptism and Pentecost accounts are ones in which the Holy Spirit plays a definitive role and the influence of the Spirit in the narrative should be felt from these accounts forward.

<sup>53</sup> A number of manuscripts replace the given text with the Greek of Ps. 2:7, υἱός μου εἶ σύ, ἐγὼ σήμερον γεγέννηκά σε. Found in Bezae, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Methodius of Olympus, Hilary, and Augustine, this variant seems to reflect the desire to harmonize and is also found in the highly-harmonized *Gospel of the Ebionites*. Although somewhat early, this variant is rejected by scholars because it is (1) not widely attested, (2) particular to a certain region, and (3) directly quoted from the LXX making it easier to insert (Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20*, 162).

<sup>54</sup> A survey of scholarship on divine sonship in the ancient world shows the term is a common designation in the Hebrew Bible, and important figures in the Hellenistic world were often referred to as “God’s son.” M. Hengel, *The Son of God* (London: SCM, 1975), 30, notes that

occurs thirteen times in Luke’s Gospel, eight of which are on the lips of non-human speakers.<sup>55</sup> In Luke 10:22 and 20:13, Jesus refers to himself as divine son four times, and a final reference to Jesus as divine son is found in the accusation of the high priests (Luke 22:70).<sup>56</sup> Of the eight attributions to non-human characters, seven are declarations of the title, stating “you are . . .” or “he will be called. . .” One of these occurrences involves use of the title as an address (Luke 8:28, τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, Ἰησοῦ υἱὲ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου;).<sup>57</sup> Thus, the title “Son” for Jesus is not widely known by characters in Luke. That is, Jesus’ sonship is primarily “special” information in Luke and as such no human figure besides Jesus uses the title.<sup>58</sup>

However, if Jesus’ followers are “sons of the Most High,” how does Luke’s Gospel distinguish Jesus’ sonship in any way from that of his followers? Several factors suggest that Jesus’ divine sonship is peculiar to him in Luke’s Gospel. First, Gabriel’s statements about Jesus’ sonship in Luke 1 set Jesus apart from other “sons”

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Julius Caesar and Augustus both used the term “God’s son” as a self-designation (inscriptions read θεοῦ υἱός). See pp. 21–30 for his introductory remarks on the subject. See also M. Peppard, “The Eagle and the Dove: Roman Imperial Sonship and the Baptism of Jesus (Mark 1:9–11),” *NTS* 56 (2010): 431–51.

This is not to say that divine sonship was a common term. Anyone referenced as a “son of God” would have been taken quite seriously in the ancient world. Rather, as Deissmann observes, the first century familiarity with divine sonship language does not necessarily imply it would also have been cliché. A. Deissmann, *Light From the Ancient East* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910), 350–51. He cites a marble inscription from Pergamum as an example, “[Αὐτοκράτ]ορ[α Κ]αίσαρα [θ]εοῦ υἱὸν θεὸν Σεβαστὸ[ν] [πάσης] γῆ[ς] καὶ θ[α]λάσσης [ἐ]π[ό]π[τ]ην[ν].”<sup>54</sup> This reference to Augustus as God’s son also ascribes to him autonomy over and guardianship of the Earth. Deissmann notes that the use of “overseer” (ἐπόπτης) refers to God in Esth. 15:2; 2 Macc. 3:39, 7:35; 3 Macc. 2:21; and *1 Clem* 59:3. That is, this laudation to Caesar was by no means conventional. Deissmann concludes, “I do not think that a [first century] Christian . . . would have . . . considered it non-significant.” Deissmann, *Light*, 350.

<sup>55</sup> H. Schürmann, *Das Lukasevangelium*, vol. 1, HTKNT (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1969), 190 n. 8, calls the Lukan baptism a “Christ-Geschichte” revelatory event.

<sup>56</sup> Luke’s Gospel refers to Jesus as the divine Son thirteen times, tied with Mark for the least references per-chapter in the canonical Gospels: 1:32, Gabriel: υἱὸς ὑψίστου κληθήσεται; 1:35, Gabriel: τὸ γεννώμενον ἅγιον κληθήσεται υἱὸς θεοῦ; 3:22, God: σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱὸς μου ὁ ἀγαπητός; 4:3, Satan: εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ; 4:9, Satan: εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ; 4:41, demon: σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ; 8:28, demoniac: Ἰησοῦ υἱὲ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου; 9:35, God: ὁ υἱὸς μου ὁ ἐκλελεγμένος; 10:22 (x3), self-references: οὐδεὶς γινώσκει τίς ἐστὶν ὁ υἱὸς εἰ μὴ ὁ πατήρ, καὶ τίς ἐστὶν ὁ πατήρ εἰ μὴ ὁ υἱὸς καὶ ὃ ἐὰν βούληται ὁ υἱὸς ἀποκαλύψαι; 20:13, self-reference in the Parable of the Tenants: πέμψω τὸν υἱόν μου τὸν ἀγαπητόν; 22:70, Sanhedrin: σὺ οὖν εἶ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ.

<sup>57</sup> The only non-declarative reference is 8:28, in which a demon simply uses the title as an address: Ἰησοῦ υἱὲ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου.

<sup>58</sup> Not even the centurion in Luke mentions Jesus’ sonship, as in Mark and Matthew.

of God.<sup>59</sup> Luke 1:32 records Gabriel’s qualification of Jesus’ sonship with the words, καὶ δώσει αὐτῷ κύριος ὁ θεὸς τὸν θρόνον Δαυὶδ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ, καὶ βασιλεύσει ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον Ἰακώβ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας καὶ τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἔσται τέλος. In this ascription, God personally gives Jesus the “throne of his father David,” a reference to the special place of Jesus in God’s plan of redemption. Furthermore, Jesus will “rule over the house of Jacob unto eternity,” indicating that there will never be a time in which Jesus is deposed from his authority and place in God’s kingdom. This first qualification of Gabriel is particular to Jesus and not an aspect of the sonship experienced by Jesus’ followers.

Second, Luke’s revelatory acts of God that mention Jesus’ sonship qualify his sonship to explain the precise nature of Jesus’ relationship to God. In this instance at the baptism, Jesus is the “beloved” (ὁ ἀγαπητός) and “well pleasing” (ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα) Son of God (Luke 3:22).<sup>60</sup> In spite of all that commentators have written about the significance of “Son of God,” the qualifying terms “beloved” and “well pleased” distinguish Jesus’ sonship from that of other claimants. Jesus is not only *a* divine son—he is *the* divine son.<sup>61</sup> Addressing “beloved” first, ἀγαπητός in this context and in other contexts<sup>62</sup> at the minimum implies that Jesus’ filial status with

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<sup>59</sup> The passages referenced here are: Luke 1:32, in which Gabriel qualifies Jesus’ sonship with the words, καὶ δώσει αὐτῷ κύριος ὁ θεὸς τὸν θρόνον Δαυὶδ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ, καὶ βασιλεύσει ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον Ἰακώβ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας καὶ τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἔσται τέλος.; In Luke 1:35, Gabriel adds, τὸ γεννώμενον ἅγιον κληθήσεται υἱὸς θεοῦ; and in the present context, Luke 3:22, God says, σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱὸς μου ὁ ἀγαπητός. A further reference to Jesus’ sonship that will be examined in later sections is Luke 9:35, in which God says, ὁ υἱὸς μου ὁ ἐκλελεγμένος. Although not a revelatory act of God, Luke 10:22 contains three self-references of Jesus to his sonship in which revelatory authority is in view: οὐδεὶς γινώσκει τίς ἐστὶν ὁ υἱὸς εἰ μὴ ὁ πατήρ, καὶ τίς ἐστὶν ὁ πατήρ εἰ μὴ ὁ υἱὸς καὶ ὃ ἐὰν βούληται ὁ υἱὸς ἀποκαλύψαι.

<sup>60</sup> Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20*, 164, writes, “at this point there is not a commendation of achievement, rather a declaration of relationships. . . .”

<sup>61</sup> Peppard, “Eagle,” bases his entire article on the significance of Jesus’ sonship with reference to the sonship of emperors.

<sup>62</sup> For example, Genesis 22 uses ἀγαπητός three times of Isaac to distinguish him as Abraham’s “only” son. This is not to make any claims to Akedah references here in Luke or any other Gospels. I only show that ἀγαπητός connotes particularity in Luke and other texts.



God is “special” or “unique” to him.<sup>63</sup> Luke also departs from the other Gospels by substituting “chosen” (Luke 9:35, ὁ ἐκλελεγμένος) for “beloved” at the transfiguration (discussed below), further emphasizing this point.<sup>64</sup> That is, “beloved” carries a particularizing nuance and the most plausible solution is that Jesus is the unique Son of God.<sup>65</sup>

### Summary of the Content of Jesus’ Baptismal Revelatory Experience

Luke initiates the baptismal revelation with the opening of heaven as an anticipation of further revelatory activity. Directly after this first sign, Luke’s descent of the Holy Spirit significantly adapts its Markan source. Luke’s addition of ἅγιον to Mark’s τὸ πνεῦμα (Mark 1:10) and his protracted description of the Holy Spirit emphasizes the divine presence with Jesus at the inception of his public ministry. Lastly, Luke’s qualification of Jesus’ divine sonship, especially in light of the revelatory experience involving Gabriel in Luke 1, shows that Jesus is the special Son of God, particularly loved by God and therefore called to an exalted role in God’s plan of redemption. Jesus’ response will now be examined.

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<sup>63</sup> Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20*, 164, notes that “beloved” in all likelihood simply means, “only.” See my argument for this in the previous chapter on Mark’s Gospel.

<sup>64</sup> Luke’s substitution of “chosen” for “beloved,” among other things, indicates that the newfound fascination some scholars have with seeing Akedah references in the Gospels may be misguided. If the Akedah was “in the air” for Gospel authors (as Huizenga says), Luke would not have been so quick to replace the keyword ὁ ἀγαπητός with ὁ ἐκλελεγμένος. Neither would Luke have allowed these two to exist side-by-side as would-be parallels. Instead, if nothing else ὁ ἀγαπητός would have been preserved in both accounts. Since the phrase is not kept in both accounts, this suggests that ὁ ἀγαπητός is simply another way of saying “special.”

<sup>65</sup> Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20*, 163, says, “whether Gen 22:1 has influenced the form of the words from heaven must remain conjectural, τὸν υἱόν μου τὸν ἀγαπητός, ‘my beloved son,’ in Luke 20:13 shows influence from Luke 3:22, but there neither father nor son is intent on sacrifice. Luke shows no discernible interest in Isaac typology.”

### *Jesus' Response*

After Jesus prays and sees the vision he does not have the same fearful reaction at the baptism as do Zechariah, Mary, and the shepherds at their angelic visions, implying his quiet acknowledgment of the voice's declaration.<sup>66</sup> One could argue that Jesus has more reason than the others to fear, since God himself is present in his visionary experience. The absence of any fearful response at the baptism is particularly interesting because (1) fear is a characteristic response in Lukan theophanic events and (2) the disciples demonstrate such fear in a similar event in which God is present as well (Luke 9:34, the transfiguration).<sup>67</sup> Instead, Luke portrays Jesus as nondescript, simply allowing the visions and voice to finish. Therefore, albeit an argument from silence, Jesus' fearless participation in the baptismal revelatory act of God suggests Jesus' special sonship is not simply communicated here but is affirmed by Jesus' quiet acknowledgement of the phenomena.

Miller contends from Luke's baptism account that there is "no reason to think that Jesus alone witnessed the Spirit's descent; the words from heaven are clearly directed to Jesus, but nowhere is it explicit that he alone hears the message."<sup>68</sup> However, assuming an audience is not what Luke's account forces us to do either. On

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<sup>66</sup> M. M. Culy, M. C. Parsons, and J. J. Stigall, *Luke: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco: Baylor, 2010), 118. Departing from both Mark's and Matthew's accounts, Luke also eliminates the verb of seeing (εἶδεν), included in both of the first two Gospels. It is likely that Luke's mention of Jesus praying may have been sufficient to communicate Jesus' personal involvement in the event. Since Jesus' prayer invokes these visions, Luke may not have seen the need to say Jesus saw anything, as Jesus was speaking to God while these things took place. A second observation supporting the fact that Luke simply did not see the need for a verb of seeing, is that chapter 1 records two very similar revelatory events (involving Zechariah and Mary), one which uses a verb of seeing and the other which does not. Luke 1:11 begins, ὥφθη δὲ αὐτῷ ἄγγελος κυρίου ἐστὼς ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου τοῦ θυμιάματος. By contrast, Luke 1:26–28 records, ὁ ἄγγελος Γαβριὴλ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ . . . ἡ δὲ ἐπὶ τῷ λόγῳ διεταράχθη καὶ διελογίζετο ποταπὸς εἴη ὁ ἄσπασμὸς οὗτος. In each account, the angel Gabriel appears and speaks to Zechariah and Mary respectively, but the descriptions of the experience of each is recounted differently. Thus, regarding Luke's description of Jesus as the audience to the baptism, little weight can be placed on the nuances of the author's omission of a verb of seeing.

<sup>67</sup> Evans, *Luke*, 255, "This story, like that of the baptism, is . . . without personal or psychological details.

<sup>68</sup> Miller, *Convinced*, 150.

the contrary, the fact that Jesus is the only witness in the text is significant and *it does not matter for the Gospel* whether or not others see the phenomena. Jesus sees the dove and hears the voice, which is the main point the text aims to communicate.

Spencer observes, “As John the Baptist prepares the people for Jesus’ advent as Lord and Messiah, the Father God and Holy Spirit prepare Jesus for his public mission.”<sup>69</sup>

Luke provides no response from Jesus in these short two verses either. Presumably, Luke reserves his response for the confrontation with Satan soon to come.<sup>70</sup>

### *Subsequent Context*

After Luke’s baptism account and the genealogy, the temptation account picks up the language of the baptism in Satan’s challenges to Jesus.<sup>71</sup> Although the temptation is not a revelatory act of God,<sup>72</sup> the devil prefaces two of his three challenges to Jesus by questioning Jesus’ sonship (Luke 4:3, 9, εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ).<sup>73</sup> Similar to the Matthean account, Luke’s temptation depicts how the devil tempts Jesus to exercise his divine sonship by performing miracles.<sup>74</sup> However, Jesus’ refusal to use his sonship to serve Satan’s means shows Jesus’ own conviction about his status as God’s Son as affirmed at his baptism and how this status will be used hereafter.<sup>75</sup> Jesus’

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<sup>69</sup> Spencer, *Gospel*, 115.

<sup>70</sup> Miller, *Convinced*, 150.

<sup>71</sup> Spencer, *Gospel*, 116. The genealogy does not involve characters in the story and their reactions to revelatory events, therefore it will not be addressed.

<sup>72</sup> Although apparently a revelatory event, the account does not make clear whether Satan was visibly or audibly manifest in the passage.

<sup>73</sup> As mentioned earlier, a revelatory act of God is, “divine disclosure. . . .” The devil is an adversary of the divine, and therefore neither he nor his emissaries fit this first criterion. Second, it is questionable if Jesus actually *sees* the devil in this pericope. The passage contains no verb of coming and does not describe Satan’s appearance. Nor is Jesus’ visual apprehension of the appearance mentioned. Luke does not even mention, as in the baptism that “a voice came” (καὶ φωνὴν . . . γενέσθαι). Instead, Luke simply records, εἶπεν δὲ αὐτῷ ὁ διάβολος (4:3). Lastly, in the temptation account the devil does not provide any new information about God, but rather parrots and challenges what God or his angels have already revealed. For these reasons, the temptation is regarded a non-revelatory religious experience.

<sup>74</sup> Evans, *Luke*, 258, prefers the translation, “*since* you are the Son of God . . .” and notes the reference to the voice’s affirmation of Jesus at the baptism.

<sup>75</sup> Spencer, *Gospel*, 118; Tannehill, *Unity*, 58.

reaction to the baptism is not recorded at the baptism itself, nor does Jesus specifically recall any of the phenomena present in that event.<sup>76</sup> However this temptation regarding Jesus' sonship acknowledges Jesus' status as affirmed by the divine voice though disputes about the way this sonship will be deployed in Jesus' mission.<sup>77</sup>

### *Conclusion to the Lukan Baptism*

The opening of heaven, descent of the Holy Spirit, qualifying declaration of Jesus' sonship, and the temptation about how Jesus will deploy his sonship all attest to the particularity of Jesus' role in God's redemptive program. Jesus emerges from the temptation as a figure with full conviction about the particular way in which his duties as Son will be carried out. Therefore, the baptism phenomena are not included to demonstrate how characters came to reverence Jesus more fully but rather how Jesus comes to understand his own role in the scope of God's plan for his life.

## Jesus' Transfiguration (Luke 9:28–36)

Peter, John, and James witness the Lukan transfiguration, perceive the visionary and auditory phenomena, and respond to Jesus. However, the content of this revelatory act of God does not correspond to the response of Peter on behalf of the disciples in this

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<sup>76</sup> Every temptation of Satan is something that Jesus later demonstrates he already possesses or has the ability to obtain. For example, Satan tempts Jesus to turn stones into bread (4:3), and later Jesus multiplies bread for the feeding of the 5,000 (9:12–17). Satan promises to give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world (4:5–6), and Jesus brings about the kingdom by God in his ministry (11:20, εἰ δὲ ἐν δακτύλῳ θεοῦ [ἐγὼ] ἐκβάλλω τὰ δαιμόνια, ἄρα ἔφθασεν ἐφ' ὑμᾶς ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ) and also acknowledges how fleeting the kingdoms of the world (21:10, Τότε ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς· ἐγερθήσεται ἔθνος ἐπ' ἔθνος καὶ βασιλεία ἐπὶ βασιλείαν). Lastly, Satan promises Jesus "authority and glory" (4:6) and Jesus demonstrates his authority in his teaching and declares his coming glory at the end of time (4:32, καὶ ἐξεπλήσσοντο ἐπὶ τῇ διδασκίᾳ αὐτοῦ, ὅτι ἐν ἐξουσίᾳ ἦν ὁ λόγος αὐτοῦ; 9:26, ὃς γὰρ ἂν ἐπαισχυνθῇ με καὶ τοὺς ἐμοὺς λόγους, τοῦτον ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐπαισχυνθήσεται, ὅταν ἔλθῃ ἐν τῇ δόξῃ αὐτοῦ καὶ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τῶν ἁγίων ἀγγέλων). Thus, everything Satan tempts Jesus with is something the Gospels show Jesus already to possess by virtue of who he is.

<sup>77</sup> S. R. Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 43.

or the subsequent context.<sup>78</sup> The paragraphs below will analyze this (1) content, (2) the responses of Peter, and (3) the subsequent narrative context to determine how the Lukan transfiguration promotes reverence for Jesus in the characters of the Gospel.

### *Content of Jesus' Transfiguration in Luke*

#### **1. The Glorious Men and Jesus' "Exodus" (Luke 9:29–31)**

Luke records that Moses and Elijah appear “in glory” with Jesus and describes Jesus’ appearance in luminous terms (9:29, 31, τὸ εἶδος τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ ἕτερον καὶ ὁ ἱματισμὸς αὐτοῦ λευκὸς ἐξαστράπτων . . . οἱ ὀφθέντες ἐν δόξῃ). Fitzmyer concludes by saying that “they are foils to Jesus. . . . Jesus is not just *Moses redivivus* or *Elias redivivus*; he is God’s Son and Chosen One.”<sup>79</sup> Jesus is the central figure of this vision, and these prominent OT figures by comparison only disappear in the end (Luke 9:36). Thus, Jesus is more prominent than either the characters of Moses or Elijah.<sup>80</sup>

Jesus’ conversation with these men about his “Exodus” is a veiled reference to his deliverance of God’s people through his coming crucifixion. The term ἔξοδος “was a natural way to describe death,”<sup>81</sup> and also occurs twice more in the New Testament, neither of which are allusions to the Israel’s Egyptian Exodus.<sup>82</sup> Although some commentators see ἔξοδος as a reference to Israel’s exodus from Egypt and “an allusion to Israel’s future salvation, which the prophets and later Jews often viewed as

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<sup>78</sup> Miller, *Convinced*, 116, notices the same thing about Zechariah’s response to Gabriel when saying, “What is interesting here is the lack of correlation between the content of the vision and Zechariah’s response.”

<sup>79</sup> Fitzmyer, *Luke I–IX*, 793, 95.

<sup>80</sup> For a typological analysis of prophetic figures in Luke, see T. L. Brodie, *The Crucial Bridge: The Elijah-Elisha Narrative as an Interpretive Synthesis of Genesis-Kings and a Literary Model for the Gospels* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2000), 82–85.

<sup>81</sup> C. S. Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity, 1993), 9:31, cites Wis. 7:6. See also B. F., *Luke*, vol. 1, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002), 376

<sup>82</sup> Heb 11:22, Πίστει Ἰωσήφ τελευτῶν περὶ τῆς ἐξόδου τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ ἐμνημόνευσεν καὶ περὶ τῶν ὁστέων αὐτοῦ ἐνετείλατο and 2 Peter 1:15, σπουδάσω δὲ καὶ ἐκάστοτε ἔχειν ὑμᾶς μετὰ τὴν ἐμὴν ἔξοδον τὴν τούτων μνήμην ποιεῖσθαι.

a new exodus,”<sup>83</sup> the term probably only connects the transfiguration with the forthcoming crucifixion of Jesus. Bock highlights the importance of “fulfillment” (πληροῦν) in Luke 9:31 as well, noting Luke’s insistence that “the events discussed are part of God’s plan. . . .”<sup>84</sup> Therefore, the presence of these OT figures at the transfiguration and the reference to “fulfillment” make a case that Jesus’ “Exodus” refers to his role in delivering God’s people through his death on the cross.

## 2. Voice and Cloud (Luke 9:34–35)

Perhaps Luke’s most significant contribution to the transfiguration account is the substitution of Mark’s ὁ ἀγαπητός for ὁ ἐκλεκτός, which underscores the authority God gives him to speak on his behalf (“Listen to him”). This particular form of ἐκλέγομαι, the perfect, passive, participle (rendered, “the one I have chosen” or simply “the chosen one”) occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, although cognates of the root are found six times in Luke and forty-one times in the NT.<sup>85</sup> Commentators agree that an allusion to Isa. 42 is quite likely.<sup>86</sup>

However, “the role of the voice is specifically to call the disciples to ‘listen to’ Jesus.”<sup>87</sup> The heavenly command, “Listen to him” endows his chosen Son with an authority not equaled even by others who may also rightly be called “sons” of God—most proximally, Moses and Elijah. Evans writes, “The transfiguration is not simply a manifestation of the heavenly status of Jesus . . . it also establishes the ultimate authority of his words on earth for his church. . . . In its present context it applies

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<sup>83</sup> Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, 869; Keener, *Background*, 9:31.

<sup>84</sup> Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, 869.

<sup>85</sup> Luke 6:13; 9:35; 10:42; 14:7; 18:7; 23:35.

<sup>86</sup> Fitzmyer, *Luke I–IX*, 802; Green, *Luke*, 384; J. J. Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, vol. 35B, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 501.

<sup>87</sup> Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 501.

particularly to his teaching on the rejection of the Son of man, which the disciples fail to comprehend.”<sup>88</sup>

### **Summary of the Content of the Lukan Transfiguration**

Jesus in Luke’s transfiguration is more authoritative than either Moses or Elijah, though both of these appear “in glory” with him and speaking about his coming “Exodus.” Luke’s transfiguration makes this clear by calling Jesus the “Chosen One” in contrast to Moses and Elijah, and also the one of whom God says, “Listen to him.”

### *Responses of the Disciples*

Luke 9:33 says that Peter’s suggestion to build tents was one of ignorance (μη εἰδὼς ὃ λέγει), illustrating this event’s ineffectiveness for generating a positive response toward Jesus among his followers.<sup>89</sup> As in Mark, Luke presents the transfiguration as a baffling experience for the disciples and one that they do not report to anyone (9:36).<sup>90</sup> Therefore, this visionary experience makes the disciples no more likely to respond positively to Jesus than before it happens. As with Mark and Matthew, Luke’s disciples leave the scene of the transfiguration with no clear sense of what they see and report the event to no one. Contrary to Pilch, who sees the transfiguration as a “vehicle of revelation for them that lessens confusion about Jesus’ identity . . . calm[ing] them down in the face of the frightening destiny that awaits Jesus,”<sup>91</sup> this revelatory act of God has surprisingly little effect on the disciples’ attitudes toward

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<sup>88</sup> Evans, *Luke*, 421.

<sup>89</sup> Miller, *Convinced*, 157, “Peter . . . misunderstands the vision, misinterprets the experience, and wants to do something to keep Moses and Elijah there.”

<sup>90</sup> Luke omits the record of Jesus commanding the disciples not to report the event until he had risen from the dead. Instead, without making any reference to the resurrection, Luke simply says they were silent, (9:36, αὐτοὶ ἐσίγησαν καὶ οὐδενὶ ἀπήγγειλαν ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις οὐδὲν ὧν ἐώρακαν). Mark 9:9 records Jesus’ command that they tell no one and the disciples’ puzzled response. Matthew 17:9 only records Jesus’ command to silence.

<sup>91</sup> J. J. Pilch, “The Transfiguration of Jesus,” in *Modelling Early Christianity: Social-Scientific Studies of the New Testament*, ed. P. F. Esler, 47–64 (London: Routledge, 1995), 63.

Jesus, his authority, or his coming death and resurrection. “The voice has just told them exactly what to do, but they cannot comprehend what has happened.”<sup>92</sup>

### *Subsequent Context*

Lukan statements about the disciples’ failure to understand Jesus may be the key to understanding the disciples’ ignorance at the transfiguration event. Luke 9:45 says, ἦν παρακεκαλυμμένον ἀπ’ αὐτῶν ἵνα μὴ αἰσθωνται αὐτό, καὶ ἐφοβοῦντο ἐρωτῆσαι αὐτὸν περὶ τοῦ ῥήματος τούτου. Similar to Mark and Matthew, Luke’s Gospel maintains a surprising level of ignorance among the disciples. Two passages in particular refer to the disciples’ later inability to understand him (Luke 9:45; 18:31–34), both of which specifically reference Jesus’ death and resurrection as points of confusion.<sup>93</sup> They also make the statements that this true understanding is, in fact, hidden from them (Luke 9:45, ἦν παρακεκαλυμμένον ἀπ’ αὐτῶν ἵνα μὴ αἰσθωνται αὐτό; Luke 18:34, ἦν τὸ ῥῆμα τοῦτο κεκρυμμένον ἀπ’ αὐτῶν καὶ οὐκ ἐγίνωσκον τὰ λεγόμενα).

The transfiguration episode, set in close proximity to both a confession about Jesus’ identity and a statement about the disciples’ ignorance, suggests that Jesus’ followers are quite unable to “listen to him.” God’s command to the disciples to “listen to him” (Luke 9:35) precedes Jesus’ command in 9:44, θέσθε ὑμεῖς εἰς τὰ ὅσα ὑμῶν τοὺς λόγους τούτους· ὁ γὰρ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου μέλλει παραδίδοσθαι εἰς χεῖρας ἀνθρώπων. Yet the disciples do not understand, even after witnessing Jesus’ conversation with Moses and Elijah about his death in Jerusalem (Luke 9:31). This

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<sup>92</sup> Miller, *Convinced*, 158.

<sup>93</sup> Spencer, *Gospel*, 146.



suggests that the disciples’ knowledge of Jesus is not aided by their participation in this revelatory experience.

Luke 9:51 adds a uniquely Lukan response of Jesus that is noteworthy. In this verse, Jesus “sets his face to go to Jerusalem” (καὶ αὐτὸς τὸ πρόσωπον ἐστήρισεν τοῦ πορεύεσθαι εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ). Tannehill suggests that Jesus’ resolve is a response to the discussion of his ἔξοδον with Moses and Elijah.<sup>94</sup> He writes, “[The transfiguration] is a process of preparation and planning . . . Jesus is seeking and being given the clarity of purpose which will enable him to ‘set his face to go to Jerusalem.’”<sup>95</sup> Therefore, as the disciples flounder in confusion, Jesus increases his determination to accomplish his mission in Jerusalem.

### *Conclusion to the Lukan Transfiguration*

Now that this chapter has examined several Lukan revelatory acts of God, the “big picture” of Luke’s use of revelatory episodes is beginning to come into focus. For example, fear has become a standard reaction to revelatory phenomena in Luke, with Jesus being the only exception.<sup>96</sup> In Luke 1–2, several characters have fearful revelatory encounters with angels. At the baptism, Jesus receives the message of the revelatory voice without fear and after this point through the first eight chapters of Luke, fearful responses during revelatory or miraculous events in Luke’s Gospel are directed mainly toward Jesus.

For all of its revelatory splendor, Jesus’ disciples are surprisingly unenlightened after the event. Luke’s transfiguration event is curiously placed between Peter’s confession (Luke 9:20) and the disciples’ lack of understanding (Luke 9:45) and one

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<sup>94</sup> Tannehill, *Unity*, 225.

<sup>95</sup> Tannehill, *Unity*, 225.

<sup>96</sup> See “Responses of Zechariah, Mary, and the Shepherds” above.

wonders how the disciples did not walk away from this revelatory act of God with more to show for it. Yet even the glorious vision of the transfiguration itself does not inspire positive responses toward Jesus in these men.

*Excursus: Luke 22:43–44*

Luke 22:43–44 takes place during Jesus’ visit to the Mount of Olives. As Jesus prays that “this cup” be removed from him, verse 43 records the appearance of an angel to strengthen him followed by him sweating like “drops of blood” (ὤφθη δὲ αὐτῷ ἄγγελος ἀπ’ οὐρανοῦ ἐνισχύων αὐτόν. καὶ γενόμενος ἐν ἀγωνίᾳ ἐκτενέστερον προσήχετο· καὶ ἐγένετο ὁ ἰδρὼς αὐτοῦ ὥσει θρόμβοι αἵματος καταβαίνοντες ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν). For Metzger the absence of Luke 22:43–44 “in such ancient and widely diversified witnesses as  $\mathfrak{P}^{(69vid),75}$   $\aleph^a$  A B T W . . . as well as [Luke 22:43–44] being marked with asterisks or obeli (signifying spuriousness) in other witnesses . . . and their transferal to Matthew’s Gospel (after 26.39) by family 13 and several lectionaries . . . strongly suggests that they are not part of the original text of Luke.”<sup>97</sup> Therefore, this thesis does not include it as part of the final form of Luke’s Gospel.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 151, also cites syr<sup>s</sup> cop<sup>sa, bo</sup> arm<sup>mss</sup> geo Marcion Clement Origin<sup>al</sup> in the first group of witnesses (those without Luke 22:43–45). NA<sup>28</sup> omits Metzger’s reference to  $\mathfrak{P}^{(69vid)}$  perhaps because the presence of Luke 22:43–44 cannot be determined with “absolute certainty” (see Nestle, *Novum Testamentum*, 59, 278, which also adds N 579 to Metzger’s inventory of manuscripts that do not include said text. Metzger lists  $\Delta^c \Pi^c 892^c$  mg 1079 1195 1216 cop<sup>bo mss</sup> as those witnesses in which this passage is marked with an asterisk or obelus (NA<sup>28</sup> adds  $\aleph^{*,2b}$  D K L Q  $\Gamma$   $\Theta$  and  $\Psi$  to Metzger’s list). In favor of this variant, he says that the presence of Luke 22:43–44 “in many manuscripts, some ancient, as well as their citation by Justin, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Eusebius, and many other Fathers, is proof of the antiquity of the account.”

<sup>98</sup> For a detailed analysis of this passage, see C. Clivaz, *L’ange et la sueur de sang (Lc 22, 43–44), ou, Comment on pourrait bien encore écrire l’histoire*, BT 7 (Leiden: Brill, 2010). See also Miller, *Convinced*, 161–63.

## The Crucifixion Phenomena (Luke 23:44–49)

Luke’s brief record of the crucifixion phenomena and the centurion’s response are potentially a turning point in the Gospel where revelatory experience is concerned. Until now, God’s revelatory acts have not changed any character’s stance toward Jesus. That is, no revelatory act of God has caused someone not following Jesus to follow him. Luke’s crucifixion account breaks that pattern as the crowd and centurion respond in faith to “what happens” at the cross. The following section will analyze the (1) revelatory content of the crucifixion, (2) the response of the witnesses, and (3) the subsequent context to determine what role this event has in producing reverence for Jesus.

### *Content of the Crucifixion Phenomena*

#### **1. Failure of the Sun (Luke 23:44–45)**

The Lukan “failure of the sun” is a sign of judgment on Israel and thus a portent of eschatological significance. Luke is the only evangelist to expand upon the three hours of darkness as τοῦ ἡλίου ἐκλιπόντος (Luke 23:44). Allison claims that Luke’s darkness is entirely non-eschatological.<sup>99</sup> Citing Luke’s elimination of the darkness in Luke 21:25 (Mark 13:24), he makes the darkness a reference to the outworking of evil in the crucifixion of Jesus, not a sign of coming judgment (cf. Luke 22:52–53).

However, two Lukan references to the darkening of the sun may counter Allison’s assertion. Luke 21:25 and Acts 2:20 both refer to an apocalyptic scene in which there are “signs in the sun, moon, and stars” (Luke 2:20, Καὶ ἔσονται σημεῖα ἐν ἡλίῳ καὶ σελήνῃ καὶ ἄστροις). Acts 2:20 says, ὁ ἥλιος μεταστραφήσεται εἰς σκότος. Both contexts are eschatological and portray impending judgment and the deliverance of

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<sup>99</sup> D. C. Allison, *The End of the Ages Has Come* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1985), 74.

God's people.<sup>100</sup> These Lukan parallels suggest that Jesus' death in Luke still has eschatological ramifications, both for judgment and salvation.<sup>101</sup>

Perhaps a closer parallel is found in Luke 22, in Jesus' comment to his pursuers in the Garden of Gethsemane. He portrays his crucifixion as being an event marked by the "authority of darkness" (Luke 22:53, ἀλλ' αὕτη ἐστὶν ὑμῶν ἡ ὥρα καὶ ἡ ἐξουσία τοῦ σκότους).<sup>102</sup> The darkness or night was seen to be a time "commonly associated with evil. In popular superstition (later found in rabbinic teaching as well), night was the time when demons ruled and witchcraft operated."<sup>103</sup> In this sense, the failure of the sun is the divine acknowledgement of the power of darkness at work in Jesus' crucifixion.<sup>104</sup> Although Jesus' comment does not include any reference to the darkening of the sun as does Luke 23:44, his arrest, trial, and crucifixion are all works of darkness acknowledged by God as Jesus hangs on the cross. The above parallels

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<sup>100</sup> J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X–XXIV*, vol. 29, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 1348, says, "[Jesus] has just foretold the 'end' of Jerusalem, which is to be desolate and 'trampled upon by pagans' (v. 24), but now he moves on to another 'end,' to 'what is coming upon the world' (v. 26)." Bruce, *Acts*, 69, connects Acts 2:20 to the Lukan crucifixion scene when saying of the context of Acts 2:20, "It was little more than seven weeks since the people in Jerusalem had indeed seen the sun turned into darkness, during the early afternoon of the day of our Lord's crucifixion. . . . These are to be understood as tokens of the advent of the day of the Lord . . . a day of judgment, to be sure, but more immediately the day of God's salvation for all who invoked His name."

<sup>101</sup> Additionally, Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities* may explain more of what Luke hopes to accomplish by adding this reference to the sun failing to shine. In *Ant.* 12.423–24, he describes a battle between Judas Maccabeus and Bacchides, in which more than half of the former's army deserted prior to battle. When the remaining men suggest they retreat, Judas replies, 'Not this! . . . May the sun not happen to look that I will show my back to the enemy' (Μὴ τοῦτ' . . . ἥλιος ἐπίδοι γινόμενον, ἵν' ἐγὼ τὰ νῶτά μου δείξω τοῖς πολεμίοις). That is, the act of retreat was so shameful to Judas that even the sun would be inclined to hide itself in the face of such an act.

A similar phrase occurs in another account in Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities* (14.308–10), in which Mark Antony says that his enemies are "guilty of lawless deeds against men and of unlawful acts against the gods, from which we believe the very sun turned away, as if it too were loath to look upon the foul deed against Caesar" (δι' αἱ καὶ τὸν ἥλιον ἀπεστράφη δόκοῦμεν, ὃς καὶ αὐτὸς ἀηδῶς ἐπεῖδε τὸ ἐπὶ Καίσαρι μύσος). See Josephus, *Antiquities*, 612. This passage is also quoted in Fitzmyer, *Luke X–XXIV*, 1518. As in the earlier quotation, some behavior is so shameful that even the sun cannot look at it. In this case, the shameful acts are directed particularly against the gods and Caesar himself, further explaining the "loathing" of the sun.

<sup>102</sup> This parallel does not assume that a reference to darkness is same as the phenomenon itself. However, Luke's literary use of darkness as a theme may well have useful points of overlap.

<sup>103</sup> Keener, *Background*, 22:52–53.

<sup>104</sup> J. Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, WBC 35c (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 1159–60, calls the darkness "Satanic."

explain Luke’s usage in 23:44. Jesus’ death is shown to be a horrible injustice that provokes even a cosmic reaction. And yet, at the same time, it is an act of eschatological significance, drawing on the language and imagery of the prophecy of Joel 2:28 and referencing the “great and terrible day of the Lord” (Acts 2:20).<sup>105</sup>

## **2. Tearing of the Temple Veil (Luke 23:45)**

Luke pairs the three hours of darkness with the tearing of the veil, moving these two phenomena closer to each other than either Mark or Matthew. Fitzmyer asserts the significance of this literary decision, noting that Luke “moved up the notice about the rending of the Temple veil to join it to the cataclysmic darkness . . . thus creating a more dramatic backdrop for the event.”<sup>106</sup> He believes that Luke does this to clarify the phenomena in comparison to the other Synoptics. “Given the Lucan presentation of Jesus in this Gospel . . . as ‘a light to give revelation to the Gentiles and glory to your people Israel’ (2:32) . . . ‘marked for the fall and rise of many in Israel’ . . . (2:34), the darkness over the whole land and rending of the Temple veil take on a clear symbolic connotation.”<sup>107</sup>

## **Summary of the Crucifixion Phenomena**

Thus, the darkness illustrates this “fall . . . of many in Israel” whereas the tearing of the veil represents the giving of revelation to the Gentiles, as the inner temple courts or the holy of holies become more widely visible.<sup>108</sup> Fitzmyer’s interpretation above may indeed be correct, but the dominant emphases of these events illustrate the

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<sup>105</sup> P. Benoit, *The Passion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1969), 199–200.

<sup>106</sup> Fitzmyer, *Luke X–XXIV*, 1512.

<sup>107</sup> Fitzmyer, *Luke X–XXIV*, 1514.

<sup>108</sup> Marshall, *Luke*, 875, notes that the LXX uses καταπέτασμα most often to refer to the curtain that separates the holy place from the holy of holies in the tabernacle (Exod. 26:31; Lev. 21:23; 24:3; Philo *Mos.* 2:86, 101; Jos. *Ant.* 8:75).

significance of Jesus' death for Jerusalem's temple cult (the tearing of the veil) and the cosmic order (the darkness). These events contain no message about Jesus and no audible statement from God of his significance. They do, however, highlight Jesus' death as these phenomena appear as he is crucified. The revelatory phenomena at the crucifixion do not provide any new information about Jesus but legitimize his significance by virtue of these signs themselves. The next section will investigate whether or not the crowd and centurion respond accordingly.

*Responses of the Crowd and Centurion (Luke 23:47–48)*

Given the content of the crucifixion phenomena, it may appear that the witnesses in the narrative grasp their basic significances as they respond by either “glorifying God” or “beating their breasts” (Luke 23:47, 48). However, the centurion's believing response seems to be a reaction to the *death* of Jesus whereas the crowd responds to the revelatory phenomena. Luke's centurion sees a singular event that “happens” (Ἰδὼν . . . τὸ γινόμενον) and glorifies God” (Luke 23:47, ἐδόξαζεν τὸν θεόν).<sup>109</sup> The text is unclear what events inspire this reaction. But Luke's doxological commentary on the centurion's response is perhaps more definitive than those of the other Synoptic Gospels. Brown notes that the reaction of witnesses to “glorify God” is common throughout the Gospel, particularly in response to “seeing Jesus manifest divine power.”<sup>110</sup> Luke's Gospel seems to reserve the phrase for response to Jesus' actions (Luke 5:23; 7:14; 13:11; 17:13; 18:41). Although Pilate and Herod both recognize Jesus' innocence along with the centurion (Luke 23:14–15), neither “glorifies God.”

<sup>109</sup> See below for a discussion on the plural form, τὰ γινόμενα, used in Luke 23:48.

<sup>110</sup> R. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 1162, cites 5:25–26, ἀπῆλθεν εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ δοξάζων τὸν θεόν; 7:16, ἔλαβεν δὲ φόβος πάντας καὶ ἐδόξαζον τὸν θεόν; 13:13, καὶ παραχρῆμα ἀνωρθώθη καὶ ἐδόξαζεν τὸν θεόν; 17:15, ὑπέστρεψεν μετὰ φωνῆς μεγάλης δοξάζων τὸν θεόν.

Brown’s observations make the centurion’s response in this context notable, but not surprising. As he sees the events surrounding the crucifixion, he responds with newfound conviction that God is manifest in Jesus. Brown sums it up nicely when saying, “Surely Luke’s readers would not stop to ask themselves, as do some modern commentators, whether it is plausible that a Gentile soldier would so easily praise the God of Israel. They would perceive that from the beginning to the end of Jesus’ life those who had eyes to see consistently lauded God.”<sup>111</sup> Fitzmyer concludes, “the evangelist’s narrative comment about the pagan Roman centurion practically makes a Christian (or at least a Jew) out of him: he ‘glorified God,’ as he acknowledged, ‘Indeed, this man was innocent.’”<sup>112</sup> Thus, Luke “attaches more importance to the Roman’s appraisal of Jesus’ true identity and takes care of the divine association. . . .”<sup>113</sup>

Luke’s description of the crowd as “leaving, beating their breasts” is unique to his Gospel (Luke 23:48, τύπτοντες τὰ στήθη ὑπέστρεφον). Brown sees the crowd’s remark is parallel with that of the centurion, both of whom observe Jesus near the cross—the place reserved by Luke for those who have not previously followed Jesus.<sup>114</sup> Scholars are divided about whether or not this crowd is truly repentant or simply troubled by the events they witness.<sup>115</sup> Spencer believes that the “daughters of

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<sup>111</sup> Brown, *Death*, 1162, continues, “moreover, they would deem it appropriate that the final glorification came from a Gentile, thus anticipating the reception of the Gospel by the ends of the earth to be narrated in the Book of Acts (where in 13:48 Gentiles will glorify the word of God).”

<sup>112</sup> Fitzmyer, *Luke X–XXIV*, 1515; F. W. Danker, *Jesus and the New Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 382, also asserts that, “only one other centurion is mentioned in Luke’s Gospel (7:2, 6) . . . [of whom] Jesus had said, ‘I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith; (7:9). The centurion at the cross was of that breed.”

<sup>113</sup> Danker, *New Age*, 382–83.

<sup>114</sup> Brown, *Death*, 1167, lines up the English of 23:47–48 to show a parallelism. In the Greek, the grammar of these statements does not bear a striking resemblance. However, the use of the identifiers (ὁ ἑκατοντάρχης τὸ γενόμενον and θεωρήσαντες τὰ γενόμενα) and the correlating responses of each (ἐδόξαζεν τὸν θεὸν λέγων and τύπτοντες τὰ στήθη ὑπέστρεφον, respectively) in adjacent verses is enough to warrant some textual relationship.

<sup>115</sup> Danker, *New Age*, 383, and J. D. Kingsbury, *Conflict in Luke* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 69, are two examples that take the crowd’s reaction as one of repentance.

Jerusalem” make up a contingent of this crowd, which is therefore why the group should be seen as responding favorably to Jesus.<sup>116</sup> Luke does not provide enough information for a conclusion. However, the crowd seems disposed favorably toward Jesus in this scene. The only other instance in which a figure “beats his breast” is in Luke 18:13, when the tax collector penitently prays, ἀλλ’ ἔτυπεν τὸ στήθος αὐτοῦ λέγων· ὁ θεός, ἰλάσθητί μοι τῷ ἁμαρτωλῷ. Brown concludes, “the repentance of the crowds is not a conversion on the level of that of the centurion, for they neither glorify God nor confess Jesus. . . . That the crowds ‘return’ . . . leaves their future obscure.”<sup>117</sup> Green agrees with Brown, that the crowds do not “convert” as does the centurion, but they do “express remorse, and this prepares for their repentance and faith in the early chapters of Acts.”<sup>118</sup>

Lastly, Luke’s variation of participial forms of γίνομαι in vv. 47–48 has implications for what the audience reacts to in context. Luke 23:47 contains the singular τὸ γινόμενον in reference to the centurion (Ἰδὼν δὲ ὁ ἑκατοντάρχης τὸ γινόμενον ἐδόξαζεν τὸν θεόν). However, the next verse contains the plural τὰ γινόμενα in reference to the onlookers (Luke 23:48, θεωρήσαντες τὰ γινόμενα, τύπτοντες τὰ στήθη ὑπέστρεφον). Brown notes that a common explanation for this variation is that “a plural subject prompted the switch to a plural object.”<sup>119</sup> Fitzmyer too believes the difference is incidental.<sup>120</sup> And Schweizer says that the singular form

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<sup>116</sup> Spencer, *Gospel*, 209.

<sup>117</sup> Brown, *Death*, 1168.

<sup>118</sup> Green, *Luke*, 824, continues by calling this a “limited but proleptic” fulfillment of Simeon’s prophecy, that God’s salvation would become available to all peoples, both Jew and Gentile (2:30–32). Green’s interpretation of the crowds is also taken up by Johnson, *Luke*, 382. And of course, the centurion’s response may well be Luke’s preparation for the favorable responses of centurions in Acts as well.

<sup>119</sup> Brown, *Death*, 1168.

<sup>120</sup> Fitzmyer, *Luke X–XXIV*, 1520.



following the centurion’s confession refers to “everything that has taken place, the miracle of the darkness and the conduct of Jesus.”<sup>121</sup>

However, a survey of articular participial forms of γίνομαι in Luke suggests that singular and plural participles are always linked to corresponding singular or plural “happenings” they describe, not their subject(s).<sup>122</sup> That is, the singular τὸ γενόμενον used of the centurion (Luke 23:47) would naturally refer to a single object to which he refers—that is, the death of Jesus. Similarly, the plural τὰ γεγόμενα used of the crowds (23:48) refers to “happenings” occurring in this context, which cause the crowd to “beat their breasts.” Other uses of the articular participle in Luke are syntactically identical.

To further reinforce the point, there are also cases in Luke’s Gospel in which a singular subject is paired with a plural object—in these cases a *plural* articular participle is used.<sup>123</sup> Likewise, Luke 8:35 is an example in which a plural subject is paired with a singular object, and the sentence calls for a *singular* articular participle. Thus, the articular participle necessarily agrees with the number of its referent, not that of its subject.

The above grammatical observations indicate that one event in the crucifixion scene prompts the centurion’s declaration (that is, the singular τὸ γενόμενον refers to one “happening”), which makes the “specific connection of the centurion’s witness with these [revelatory] events . . . much less clear in Lk than in Mt.”<sup>124</sup> Immediately before the declaration, the centurion witnesses Jesus’ dying prayer on the cross (Luke 23:46, καὶ φωνήσας φωνῇ μεγάλῃ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν· πάτερ, εἰς χεῖράς σου παρατίθεμαι

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<sup>121</sup> E. Schweizer, *The Good News According to Luke*, trans. D. E. Green (London: SPCK, 1984), 362.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. The use of the singular articular participle in Luke 2:15; 8:34, 35, 56; 24:12; See also the plural used in 9:7; 10:13; 13:17; 24:18.

<sup>123</sup> E.g., Luke 9:7; 24:18.

<sup>124</sup> Michaels, “Centurion’s Confession,” 107.

τὸ πνεῦμά μου. τοῦτο δὲ εἰπὼν ἐξέπνευσεν). With this grammatical hint of Luke and since Mark is understood to be Luke’s template, one can reasonably conclude that Jesus’ manner of death causes the centurion to say what he does in Luke 23:47.

The plural τὰ γινόμενα associated with the crowds refers to both the way Jesus dies and the “failure of the sun,” since the tearing of the temple veil would not have been visible from Golgotha.<sup>125</sup> Because the nature of the crowd’s response is generally positive, whether or not they “glorify God” as does the centurion, the revelatory phenomena at the crucifixion can be said to engender reverence for Jesus among the crowd.

Therefore, Luke’s language suggests that the crowd notices the revelatory phenomena of the crucifixion and the centurion only the death of Jesus. The centurion’s “practical conversion”<sup>126</sup> in response to seeing Jesus die makes Jesus the impetus for his newfound devotion to God, but not the revelatory activity of God. The crowd, on the other hand, notices the revelatory phenomena and responds positively as they “beat their breasts.” Therefore, this revelatory act of God in Luke does promote reverence for Jesus.

### *Subsequent Context*

Neither Luke’s confessing centurion nor the crowds show up again in the Gospel’s final verses to add to our research on these characters. However, one group not mentioned above is those mentioned in Luke 23:49, “All his friends standing from afar and the women who followed him in Galilee saw these things” (ταῦτα). Again, Luke uses an ambiguous word, this time a neuter, plural demonstrative pronoun, to

<sup>125</sup> Brown, *Death*, 1167–69, commenting on the participial forms, believe that the centurion’s declaration is likely included in what causes the crowd to “beat their breasts.”

<sup>126</sup> Fitzmyer, *Luke X–XXIV*, 1515; Danker, *New Age*, 382, also asserts that, “only one other centurion is mentioned in Luke’s Gospel (7:2, 6) . . . [of whom] Jesus had said, ‘I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith; (7:9). The centurion at the cross was of that breed.’”

describe what this group of people witness. One cannot be sure if “these things” refers to the responses of the crowds/centurion, Jesus’ death, the revelatory phenomena, or all of the above. Also, regarding the identity of this group of people, Luke’s wording is probably hyperbolic, but it likely includes the eleven disciples among his female followers.<sup>127</sup> Because this group (1) has no response to the crucifixion phenomena in Luke 23:49 and (2) responds to the resurrection phenomena in Luke 24, this thesis reserves discussion on these figures for the sections that follow.

### *Conclusion to the Crucifixion Phenomena*

At the crucifixion, the revelatory acts of God do produce a positive response in the crowd that leaves them “beating their breasts” at what happens. The centurion’s response is a more robust confession but is only a response to Jesus on the cross. Luke provides no indication as to whether either group understands specific phenomena, but depicts the event and their responses in more general terms, perhaps to make Jesus the focal point of the narrative whether or not God’s revelatory acts are present.

## The Resurrection Appearances (Luke 24:1–53)

The revelatory acts of God in Luke 24, the resurrection appearances, are less decisive than one might assume.<sup>128</sup> Of course, Luke shows ample evidence of these appearances being the setting in which characters in the Gospel demonstrate increased

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<sup>127</sup> Evans, *Luke*, 879.

<sup>128</sup> Although Luke is careful to point out that Jesus’ resurrected body is nonetheless human (e.g., he eats in 24:41–43, is corporeal 24:39–40, etc.), because this body of his is miraculously resurrected from death and he appears in bodily form to his followers, these appearances are considered “revelatory acts of God.”

reverence for Jesus.<sup>129</sup> However, the appearances themselves often require something more for characters to react positively to Jesus. The chapter begins with the three women’s visit to the empty tomb, as they encounter angelic messengers announcing Jesus’ resurrection (Luke 24:1–12). Jesus then appears on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–34, 36–49) and in Jerusalem before ascending to heaven (Luke 24:50–53).

Each of these events involves the appearance of heavenly beings delivering a message to Jesus’ followers. The sections below will address the (1) content of the appearances, (2) responses of witnesses to the content, and (3) the subsequent context<sup>130</sup> of these revelatory acts of God to analyze the relationship between revelatory acts of God and reverence for Jesus in Luke’s Gospel.

### *Content of the Resurrection Appearances*

#### **1. The Christ Should Suffer and Rise (Luke 24:7, 25–26, 46)**

Luke refers to the necessity of the crucifixion and resurrection in this chapter underscoring the importance of seeing Jesus’ life as the fulfillment of Israel’s scripture. The first mention of the necessity of the crucifixion and resurrection occurs by the angel at the empty tomb, where the angel explicitly references the two events (Luke 24:7, λέγων τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὅτι δεῖ παραδοθῆναι εἰς χεῖρας ἀνθρώπων ἁμαρτωλῶν καὶ σταυρωθῆναι καὶ τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ ἀναστῆναι). The second reference is on the lips of Jesus as he rebukes the travelers for being “ignorant and hard of heart” (Luke 24:25). This statement references the necessity of the Christ’s “suffering and entering into his glory” (Luke 24:26, οὐχὶ ταῦτα ἔδει παθεῖν τὸν χριστὸν καὶ εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ;). The third reference appears in Jesus’ interaction with his

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<sup>129</sup> Schubert, “Structure,” 166, calls Luke 24 the “literary conclusion and . . . theological climax” of the Gospel.

<sup>130</sup> Because Luke 24 is the final chapter in the Gospel, the chapter’s setting in the wider context of the Gospel will be addressed in this section.

disciples, when he combines the above two statements and says, οὕτως γέγραπται παθεῖν τὸν χριστὸν καὶ ἀναστῆναι ἐκ νεκρῶν τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ (Luke 24:46).

Although the final of these references makes clear that this redemptive act is foreshadowed in Israel’s scripture, Fitzmyer observes that Luke’s consistent use of δεῖ denotes the fulfillment of Scripture. The “frequent use [of δεῖ] in Luke in contrast to the isolated occurrences of it in Mark (8:31) and Matthew (16:21) reveal the importance of it.”<sup>131</sup> That is, in Luke this “necessity” arises from Jesus’ understanding of the relationship between his vocation and Israel’s scripture.

Jesus’ understanding of Israel’s scripture can hardly be called “universal” in that it seems that none of his followers understand Scripture in the same way.<sup>132</sup> “From the perspective of his followers, the answer is, clearly and categorically, No! According to Jesus, the perspective of the Scriptures is different. . . . [pointing] forward to the realization of the divine purpose in God’s Messiah.”<sup>133</sup> But this language of necessity “is a particular Lukan preoccupation” and that is ultimately provoked by Jesus’ view of himself as relates Israel’s scripture.<sup>134</sup> None of what happened in his suffering and resurrection is a surprise, but everything happens in fulfillment of what is written about Jesus. And as Tannehill summarizes, Luke 24 presents “a continuous, developing discussion of Jesus’ death and resurrection.”<sup>135</sup> This feature of the revelatory experiences of Luke 24 makes clear that the disciples must see Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection as acts of fulfillment.

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<sup>131</sup> Fitzmyer, *Luke I–IX*, 180, notes δεῖ in the following places: Luke 2:49; 4:43; 9:22; 13:33; 17:25; 19:5; 21:9; 22:37; 24:7, 26, 44.

<sup>132</sup> Spencer, *Gospel*, 211.

<sup>133</sup> Green, *Luke*, 848.

<sup>134</sup> Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, 1204.

<sup>135</sup> R. C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts, vol. 1: The Gospel according to Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 277.

## 2. Disciples Do Not Recognize Jesus (Luke 24:16, 37)

The failure of Jesus’ followers to immediately recognize him when he appears to them highlights the inability of revelatory experiences to elicit a reverential response in these witnesses. Commentators generally think that Jesus’ physical appearance is not what prohibits the disciples from recognizing him.<sup>136</sup> As Nolland writes, “there is no reason to think of Jesus being in ‘another form.’”<sup>137</sup>

However, one must still account for why the Emmaus travelers see the resurrected Jesus and yet do not recognize him until later. They see him as a physical person and treat him normally, as they would any visitor to Jerusalem (Luke 24:18, σὺ μόνος παροικεῖς Ἱερουσαλὴμ καὶ οὐκ ἔγνωσ τὰ γενόμενα ἐν αὐτῇ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ταύταις;). The following appearance of Jesus to the disciples in Luke 24:37 portrays the inverse: Jesus’ followers seem to recognize that the figure is Jesus but think he is a spirit rather than a physical person (πτοηθέντες δὲ καὶ ἔμφοβοι γενόμενοι ἐδόκουν πνεῦμα θεωρεῖν).<sup>138</sup> That is, “they recognize the one before them as Jesus, but are not ready to accept that he could have any form other than an intangible one.”<sup>139</sup>

This Lukan variance may be the reason why he employs different symbols to illustrate the blindness of his followers to him.<sup>140</sup> In both cases, the risen Jesus is not immediately discernible to his followers either personally or physically. Jesus appears and his followers cannot identify him properly in his risen state.

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<sup>136</sup> G. W. E. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism and Early Christianity*, HTS 56 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 239, likens this account to angelophanies, in which heavenly beings disappear and reappear.

<sup>137</sup> Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, 1201.

<sup>138</sup> Fitzmyer, *Luke X–XXIV*, 1575–76. One may argue that the disciples neither recognize that the being is Jesus nor that the being is a physical person. The text says, “thinking that they saw a spirit.” It does not say they saw Jesus and thought him to be a spirit, but that they perceived a certain spirit, without specifying if they thought the spirit is Jesus.

<sup>139</sup> Green, *Luke*, 854.

<sup>140</sup> Discussed below, the Emmaus walkers have “blind eyes” (Luke 24:16) whereas the disciples had closed minds (Luke 24:45).

### 3. “Remember How He Told You” (Luke 24:6, 44)

The exhortations to remember Jesus’ words during his earthly ministry are references to his revelatory authority.<sup>141</sup> Particularly in Luke 24:6 and 44, the angels and Jesus reprimand their listeners by telling them that Jesus predicted his death and resurrection during his earthly ministry. That is, the authority of Jesus’ words is recalled here, not any other miraculous events in Jesus’ ministry.<sup>142</sup> Jesus is vested with the ability to speak on his own accord about forthcoming events in God’s redemptive program.

Green adds that this prophetic authority of Jesus brings about clarity and conviction in the minds of Jesus’ followers. He writes, “it cannot be overlooked, though, that the move from perplexity to clarity . . . is enabled by the . . . call to remember Jesus’ words.”<sup>143</sup> These calls reverberate through Luke’s final chapter as a statement about the centrality of Jesus in God’s revelatory program.

Luke’s characters are not told to remember the statements of God or his angels from earlier in Luke, but rather the words of Jesus as Jesus himself enables these followers to understand him. Related to the calls to remember Jesus’ words are Lukan references to the Scriptures, also reiterated throughout Luke 24. Three texts specifically recall prophecy from the Old Testament as speaking directly to Jesus, and the opening event with the angels implies such a reference (Luke 24:6–7; 25–26, 32, 44–46).<sup>144</sup> Jesus’ authority to speak prophetically is the focus.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Jesus’ interaction with the disciples on the road to Emmaus does not include a variation of the phrase translated, “These are my words that I spoke to you . . .” (Luke 24:44). However, the content of the words in Luke 24:6, 44 is repeated on the road to Emmaus.

<sup>142</sup> Green, *Luke*, 838, “The angel’s message fuses Jesus’ predictions during the Galilean phase of his ministry (Luke 9:22, 44).”

<sup>143</sup> Green, *Luke*, 836.

<sup>144</sup> The use of *δεῖ* in 24:7, when viewed in context with other statements in Luke 24 about Jesus’ death and resurrection foreshadowed in the Hebrew Bible, make the same an implication of v. 7.

<sup>145</sup> Green, *Luke*, 838.

### **Summary of Content of the Resurrection Experiences**

The content of Luke 24's revelatory experiences carry much christological information that is repeated throughout the chapter. Three times, Jesus' suffering and resurrection are referenced either by the angel at the empty tomb or by Jesus himself.<sup>146</sup> Moreover, the *necessity* of Jesus' suffering and resurrection is treated as a fulfillment of Israel's scripture. These necessary acts on Jesus' part are coupled with the rather elusive figure of the risen Jesus, who defies either personal or physical recognition by his followers.

The authority of Jesus during his earthly ministry is also a focus of Luke 24's revelatory acts of God. Jesus' followers are twice admonished to remember Jesus' words (Luke 24:6, 44). However, the very fact that such an admonition is part of these revelatory events shows that early attempts made by Jesus to communicate these things were ineffective in helping the disciples understand him properly. That is, the words of the earthly Jesus are here redoubled in the content of these resurrection appearances.

### *Responses to the Resurrection Appearances*

Luke 24 places the impaired responses of Jesus' followers on a spectrum and seems to require a "second stage" of illumination for them to finally respond positively. The following section will analyze the responses across this final chapter of the Gospel, particularly identifying themes that are common among most or all of these accounts.

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<sup>146</sup> Tannehill, *Unity*, 277.



### 1. Fearful, Impaired Responses to the Resurrection (Luke 24:5, 16, 37)

Luke 24:5 mentions the women fearing greatly at the appearance of the angels (ἐμφοβῶν δὲ γενομένων) and Luke 24:37 describes the fear of the disciples at the sight of Jesus, thinking they see a spirit (πτοηθέντες δὲ καὶ ἔμφοβοι γενόμενοι ἐδόκουν πνεῦμα θεωρεῖν).<sup>147</sup> The reintroduction of fear as a response to heavenly visions in Luke's Gospel is consonant with earlier observations: In Luke 1–2, fear is the consistent reaction of those who see visions of angels. In Luke 3–9, fear is exclusively used of the reaction characters have to the mighty works of Jesus. Here in Luke 24, fear is a reaction to both the angelic figures and the resurrected Jesus.

Lukan responses of fear are usually not tied to either positive or negative attitudes toward Jesus. Luke's characters express fear in both contexts.<sup>148</sup> As for the responses of characters in Luke 1–2, God's three revelatory acts in Luke 1–2 all give God's favor as a reason not to fear (Luke 1:12, 30; 2:10). For those of Luke 3–8, Luke 7:16 is a prime example in which people fear Jesus after a miracle, saying, "God has visited his people!"<sup>149</sup>

In Luke 24, although the women's fear is not explained, the context of their fearful response to the angels is negative, since the angels chastise them even for looking for Jesus' body (Luke 24:5). Luke does comment on the disciples' fear in Luke 24:38–37: πτοηθέντες δὲ καὶ ἔμφοβοι γενόμενοι ἐδόκουν πνεῦμα θεωρεῖν. καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· τί τεταραγμένοι ἐστέ καὶ διὰ τί διαλογισμοὶ ἀναβαίνουσιν ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ ὑμῶν; In this instance as well, fear is not a positive statement as in Luke 7:16. Rather,

<sup>147</sup> D. A. Smith, "Seeing a Pneuma(tic Body): The Apologetic Interests of Luke 24:36–43," *CBQ* 72 (2010): 752–72, argues that this πνεῦμα reference of Luke's is an apologetic against Paul's vague and ambiguous reference to the resurrection, both as a "vision" (2 Cor 12:1–4) and as something he personally experiences (1 Cor 15:5–8; Gal 1:15).

<sup>148</sup> In Luke 1, both Zechariah and Mary fear the angel Gabriel. The former does so in unbelief and the latter in belief.

<sup>149</sup> Other examples of fear of heavenly beings are: Luke 5:26; 8:25, 35–37; 9:34. There are two counter examples in which fear may be connected with unbelief: Luke 8:50; 9:45.

their troubled reaction at seeing a ghost is actually a doubt that Jesus is physically standing before them. Fear thus far in Luke 24, is coupled with Jesus' followers' confusion and failure to respond positively to the resurrection announcement or appearances.

The negative responses of Jesus' followers are evident in more than just the occurrences of fear in Luke 24. However, these responses are a recurrent theme in this final chapter. As mentioned earlier, the appearance of the angels to the women includes the reprimand of the women for not believing the prophecies Jesus made during his earthly ministry. Luke 24:5b–7, 8 says, τί ζητεῖτε τὸν ζῶντα μετὰ τῶν νεκρῶν; οὐκ ἔστιν ὧδε, ἀλλὰ ἠγέρθη. μνησθητε ὡς ἐλάλησεν ὑμῖν ἔτι ὢν ἐν τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ . . . καὶ ἐμνήσθησαν τῶν ῥημάτων αὐτοῦ. A comparable scolding is found in Luke 24:25–26 (ὧ ἄνόητοι καὶ βραδεῖς τῇ καρδίᾳ) just after the Emmaus travelers' eyes “were kept” from recognizing him (οἱ δὲ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτῶν ἐκρατοῦντο τοῦ μὴ ἐπιγνῶναι αὐτόν). Luke 24:41 contains the odd reference to the disciples' “disbelief for joy” (ἔτι δὲ ἀπιστοῦντων αὐτῶν ἀπὸ τῆς χαρᾶς).

Some commentators distinguish between the different responses in Luke 24. For example, Perkins thinks that the statement about the women, “and they remembered” (Luke 24:8), indicates that they may have believed in Jesus *prior* to this time.<sup>150</sup> She asserts, “this verse affirms the resurrection kerygma as the source of faith in the risen Jesus,” saying that to deny the previous faith of the women at the earlier teaching of Jesus “dissolves obvious links that Luke has established between this passage and the rest of the gospel.”<sup>151</sup> Her analysis of the other revelatory experiences of Luke 24 does not affirm the same thing about the disciples' responses but insists “that there is

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<sup>150</sup> P. Perkins, *Resurrection: New Testament Witness and Contemporary Reflection* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1984), 155.

<sup>151</sup> Perkins, *Resurrection*, 155.

a distinction between the ‘they remembered’ attributed to the women and the ‘hardheartedness’ attributed to the disciples on the road. The women have come to revere Jesus because they remember his teaching. The disciples must have it repeated for them.”<sup>152</sup>

However, Perkins’ distinction above in the belief of the women and unbelief of the disciples is not as clear as Perkins indicates. Certainly the women seem to be the first to come to the conclusion that Jesus really is raised.<sup>153</sup> But the angelic reprimand and response of the women (Luke 24:5, 8, τί ζητεῖτε τὸν ζῶντα μετὰ τῶν νεκρῶν; . . . καὶ ἐμνήσθησαν τῶν ῥημάτων αὐτοῦ) records only that the women remember Jesus’ *words* (not their response to his words). The fact that the women come to the tomb to embalm Jesus’ body and then have to be reminded of Jesus’ earthly predictions of resurrection alone suggests the women did not believe Jesus’ words to be relevant to their visit to the tomb.<sup>154</sup>

Also, the content of the Emmaus rebuke is remarkably similar to that of the women.<sup>155</sup> Both texts repeat the words of Jesus for emphasis. Luke 24:6–7 says, μνήσθητε ὡς ἐλάλησεν ὑμῖν . . . λέγων τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὅτι δεῖ παραδοθῆναι εἰς χεῖρας ἀνθρώπων ἀμαρτωλῶν καὶ σταυρωθῆναι καὶ τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ ἀναστῆναι. By comparison, Luke 24:26, οὐχὶ ταῦτα ἔδει παθεῖν τὸν χριστὸν καὶ εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ is fundamentally the same in their calls to recollect what is “necessary.” Neither group of followers in Luke 24 understands the necessity of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Instead, Luke portrays these characters as fearful followers of Jesus who

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<sup>152</sup> Perkins, *Resurrection*, 188.

<sup>153</sup> Luke 24:11 plainly states this, καὶ ἐφάνησαν ἐνώπιον αὐτῶν ὥσει λῆρος τὰ ῥήματα ταῦτα, καὶ ἠπίστουν αὐταῖς.

<sup>154</sup> This thesis does not argue that the women remain unchanged after their revelatory experience at the tomb. See M.-L. Rigato, ““Remember” . . . Then They Remembered: Luke 24:6–8,” in *Luke and Acts*, (eds.) G. O’Collins and G. Marconi (New York: Paulist, 1993), 93–102. Instead, Perkins’ argument that the women believed Jesus’ words *before the empty tomb* is here found less convincing.

<sup>155</sup> R. J. Dillon, *From Eye-Witnesses to Ministers of the Word* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1978), 132.

are generally ignorant of the purposes of Jesus in his passion and resurrection until this final chapter.<sup>156</sup>

Therefore, Luke 24 is adamant in its portrayal of the blindness of the disciples, which “serves to highlight the contrast between human understanding . . . and God’s way of working in Jesus.”<sup>157</sup> That is, Luke’s final chapter “dramatizes” these impaired responses to Jesus in several very ironic scenes, which “set the table” for Jesus himself to open the eyes, hearts, and minds of his people.<sup>158</sup>

## 2. Changing Their Eyes, Hearts, and Minds (Luke 24:31–32, 35, 45)

Statements about the “eyes,” “hearts,” and “minds” of Jesus’ followers in Luke 24 assert that Jesus personally intervenes to produce a reverential response in aid of his followers’ ignorance or confusion. Thus, references to the “eyes,” “hearts,” and “minds” of Jesus’ followers (Luke 24:16, 31, 45) are symbols of their reception of Jesus.<sup>159</sup> Regarding the “heart,” two of the three instances that refer to the disciples’ understanding of scripture in Luke 24 also contain a reference to their “hearts.” Luke 24:25–26 calls the men on the road to Emmaus “slow of heart to believe” (βραδεῖς τῇ καρδίᾳ τοῦ πιστεύειν) and the same pericope describes the way these men’s “hearts burned” as Jesus “opened the Scriptures” (Luke 24:32, οὐχὶ ἡ καρδία ἡμῶν καιομένη ἦν . . . ὥς διήνοιγεν ἡμῖν τὰς γραφάς;). The “eyes” and “minds” (ὀφθαλμοὶ and νοῦς) are also body parts used to symbolize one’s response to Jesus (Luke 24:16, 45).<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Dillon, *Eye-Witnesses*, 51. See also Perkins, *Resurrection*, 155, 187 who interacts with Dillon’s work.

<sup>157</sup> Tannehill, *Unity*, 282.

<sup>158</sup> Tannehill, *Unity*, 282.

<sup>159</sup> G. K. Beale, “Isaiah VI 9–13: A Retributive Taunt against Idolatry,” *VT* 41 (1991): 257–74, 258, 273, calls this “sensory organ malfunction.” See also G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 161–83.

<sup>160</sup> Luke’s Emmaus walkers fail to recognize the man walking with them as Jesus. Luke says of these men that their “eyes were kept from recognizing him” (24:16, οἱ δὲ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτῶν ἐκρατοῦντο τοῦ μὴ ἐπιγνῶναι αὐτόν). The disciples recognize that Jesus is a physical person. And the text says that Jesus “opened their minds to understand the Scriptures” (24:45, τότε διήνοιξεν αὐτῶν τὸν νοῦν τοῦ συνιέναι τὰς γραφάς). Of course, these references to the “eyes”

Four observations about the disciples’ understanding of Jesus are relevant. First, Jesus’ followers do not respond positively to Jesus solely as the result of his appearances to them, but a subsequent “opening” of the “eyes,” “hearts,” or “minds” is recounted.<sup>161</sup> In this way, Luke 24 makes a slight distinction between the revelatory events themselves and the moment of understanding for Jesus’ followers. That is, Luke distinguishes between an outward, revelatory phenomenon and the inward appreciation of what that phenomenon represents. Marshall suggests that the closing and opening of the disciples’ eyes toward Jesus disconnects the revelatory phenomena (seeing the risen Jesus) from the ability to understand him properly.<sup>162</sup> In these cases, illumination from Jesus is necessary for his followers to respond positively to him.

Second, the account of the Emmaus travelers in Luke 24:32 and 24:35 shows a distinction between the moment in which their eyes are opened and the time at which their hearts first begin to “burn within them” as they sense something different about the way their companion explains the Scriptures. Luke 24:32 places these first inner stirrings of these men during the time when Jesus “opens” the Scriptures to them. After this discussion and their invitation that Jesus stay the night, the men’s eyes are

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and “mind” may be similar ways of referring to the faculties of perception. Commentators have paralleled these references to the “comprehension, faith, and salvation elsewhere in the Gospel” (Green, *Luke*, 845). Green also cites 1:78–79; 2:30; 6:39–42; 10:23; 11:34; 18:35–42; 19:42. However, Luke’s differentiation between the particular inabilities of each group of Jesus-followers to perceive or understand may be related to his choice of “eyes” or “minds” to depict the category of their misunderstanding.

<sup>161</sup> Luke is not specific about the progression of the women’s positive response to the angels at the tomb. As mentioned above, a response of fear is used one other time in Luke 24:38–39 in which the disciples are reproved for their hard hearts. Luke does not describe the women’s fear in the same terms, but the angels do reprove them for not having believed Jesus’ words during his earthly ministry (Luke 24:6–7). Luke 24:8 says, καὶ ἐμνήσθησαν τῶν ῥημάτων αὐτοῦ, with no temporal indicator as to when this happens. This thesis contends that the development of the women’s response in this first revelatory act of God of Luke 24 is explained less fully in lieu of the coming scenes that involve the risen Jesus, in which he is personally active in changing the way his followers understand him.

<sup>162</sup> Marshall, *Luke*, 893.

finally and fully “opened” as he breaks and blesses the bread (Luke 24:30–31).<sup>163</sup> This distinction highlights the process that these men undergo before fully appreciating that Jesus has risen.

Third, Jesus makes Israel’s scripture a litmus test for whether or not a person’s “eyes,” “heart,” or “mind” is opened to believe in him. Luke 24 references “Scripture,” “prophets,” or “law” six times in discussion about Jesus as their fulfillment (Luke 24:19, 25, 27, 32, 44, 45). In Luke 24:25 Jesus chastises the Emmaus travelers by calling them “foolish and slow of heart” (ὁ ἀνόητοι καὶ βραδεῖς τῇ καρδίᾳ), citing as evidence their failure to understand the Scriptures during his earthly ministry (ὁ ἀνόητοι καὶ βραδεῖς τῇ καρδίᾳ τοῦ πιστεύειν ἐπὶ πᾶσιν οἷς ἐλάλησαν οἱ προφῆται). Shortly after this, in Luke 24:31, their “eyes are opened,” and they later describe this experience in the following way, “did not our hearts burn while he opened the Scriptures” (Luke 24:32, οὐχὶ ἡ καρδία ἡμῶν καιομένη ἦν . . . ὡς διήνοιγεν ἡμῖν τὰς γραφάς;). Green comments that such statements in Luke 24 show, “how the career of Jesus and the message of the Scriptures are mutually informative.”<sup>164</sup> The disciples’ response to the risen Jesus and their understanding of the Scriptures are interwoven. And as the Scriptures are recognized, so is Jesus.

Fourth, Luke talks about Jesus’ “opening” of the Scriptures in the same way that he does Jesus’ “opening” of the eyes, hearts, and minds of Jesus’ followers.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> One wonders if Luke here implies that the “opening” of these men’s eyes is in fact their notice of the wounds on Jesus’ hands as he breaks the bread, similar to the disciples recognition of Jesus through his wounds in Luke 24:39–40.

<sup>164</sup> Green, *Luke*, 856.

<sup>165</sup> M. W. Bates, “Closed-Minded Hermeneutics? A Proposed Alternative Translation for Luke 24:45,” *JBL* 129 (2010): 537–57, 554, contends for a new translation of this Luke 24:45, τότε διήνοιξεν αὐτῶν τὸν νοῦν τοῦ συνιέναι τὰς γραφάς, arguing for, “Then Jesus explicated the Scriptures so that they might understand their meaning.” Bates admits that word order does not support his translation and neither do the writings of the earliest Christians. He argues that the semantic ranges of διανοίγω and νοῦς are better accommodated by his alternative translation. Whether or not this new translation is linguistically justified is highly questionable. Moreover, Bates’ motive in taking this argument, to remove the element of, “supernatural illumination,” does not follow even if his translation is granted. “Supernatural illumination” is patently clear in

Commentators often attribute the disciples’ ignorance simply to a “lack of insight” on their part.<sup>166</sup> However, Luke’s language insinuates that Jesus has a more active role than simply explaining what is already in Scripture. Jesus reinterprets Scripture in light of himself, declaring himself to be its fulfillment.<sup>167</sup> Luke 24:6–7 is the first example, in which the angels call the women to “remember” (μνήσθητε) Jesus’ predictions to them in Galilee. Luke 24:8 simply says that the women remember Jesus’ words (καὶ ἐμνήσθησαν τῶν ῥημάτων αὐτοῦ) before returning to report to the disciples. In other words, the call to remember Jesus’ words in light of the present context causes the women to interpret the Scriptures differently than they ever could have done without the resurrection. Although Jesus is not present in this scene to produce a correct understanding of the Scriptures in these women (as with the disciples in later scenes), Luke makes Jesus’ own words during his earthly ministry central in their coming to understand the Scriptures. In the account of the Emmaus travelers, Luke 24:27 says that Jesus “interpreted” (διερμήνευσεν) the Scriptures for them concerning himself and the men later report that their hearts first begin to “burn” when Jesus opened to them the Scriptures (Luke 24:32). Later in Luke 24:45, Jesus opens the minds of the disciples to understand the Scriptures (τότε διήνοιξεν αὐτῶν τὸν νοῦν τοῦ συνιέναι τὰς γραφάς). The conceptual pairing of Jesus’ scriptural explanations and his followers’ understanding of who he is suggests that Jesus acts upon the Scriptures in a way similar to how he does the perceptive faculties of his followers. Therefore, Luke here implies that Jesus’ interpretation of himself as the fulfillment of Scripture is an idea original to Jesus that changes the way his followers view Scripture altogether.

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Luke 24 where characters’ understanding of Scripture is concerned (e.g., Luke 24:6–8, 31–32). Indeed, the whole of Luke 24 would have to be retranslated were Bates’ conclusion to stand!

<sup>166</sup> Tannehill, *Unity*, 282.

<sup>167</sup> R. N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 36–58. See also R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1971).

Therefore, Luke 24 shows that God’s revelatory acts alone do not open the “eyes,” “hearts,” or “minds” of Jesus’ followers if one considers the *appearance* of the risen Jesus itself to be a “revelatory act of God.” Instead, Jesus’ subsequent illumination during these revelatory experiences<sup>168</sup> of his followers is what engenders reverence for him. In this way, Luke emphasizes the “development from blindness to sight, from minds without understanding to opened minds.”<sup>169</sup> Luke 24 also interrelates the proper understanding of Israel’s scripture and Jesus for his followers. Jesus’ followers’ failure to identify him is tied to their failure to understand the Scriptures. To state the inverse, when a Lukan character properly understands both Scripture and revelatory events in light of Jesus, they show themselves to have had their “eyes opened” by Jesus. However, Jesus opens not only the eyes of the disciples but also the Scriptures to their minds, as he reinterprets prophecy in light of himself. Thus, Luke’s emphasis on the “development” of Jesus’ followers’ understanding and the added connection between Jesus and Israel’s scripture establish Jesus as the one to bring about such development.<sup>170</sup> Therefore, this thesis sees a “two-stage” enlightenment of Jesus’ disciples in Luke 24, as they first see the risen Jesus and only later recognize him and understand Scripture in light of him.

### 3. A Resurgent Community

In addition to the resurrection appearances to individuals, Luke 24 also repeatedly mentions the believers’ *corporate* activity to indicate a resurgence of Jesus’ followers in the aftermath of his resurrection. Five times in the chapter, Luke uses communal language to describe the experience of Jesus’ followers. In Luke 24:14–15 and 36, the

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<sup>168</sup> I.e., subsequent to the appearance itself.

<sup>169</sup> Tannehill, *Unity*, 281.

<sup>170</sup> Presumably, it would be anti-climactic for Jesus in Luke to be the culmination of and for him not to also be the one to bring about such an understanding in his followers.



followers are “talking with one other” about the events of the weekend (24:14–15, καὶ αὐτοὶ ὡμίλουν πρὸς ἀλλήλους περὶ πάντων τῶν συμβεβηκότων τούτων. καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ ὁμιλεῖν αὐτοὺς καὶ συζητεῖν; 24:36, ταῦτα δὲ αὐτῶν λαλούντων).<sup>171</sup> In Luke 24:4 and 41, they all marvel or are perplexed about the revelatory events they witness (24:4, καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ ἀπορεῖσθαι αὐτὰς περὶ τούτου; 24:41, ἔτι δὲ ἀπιστούντων αὐτῶν ἀπὸ τῆς χαρᾶς καὶ θαυμαζόντων). In each of these cases, the corporate response of Jesus’ followers is mentioned rather than that of any individuals.<sup>172</sup>

“Return” (ὑποστρέφω) is also common to all three revelatory acts of God of Luke’s final chapter. Nolland notices the “return” of the women, Emmaus walkers, and disciples after witnessing the angels and the risen Jesus (Luke 24:9, 33, 52 all use ὑποστρέφω).<sup>173</sup> The women return to the disciples to share their experience at the empty tomb (Luke 24:9). The Emmaus walkers return to Jerusalem after their experience of Jesus over the breaking of bread (Luke 24:33). The disciples return to Jerusalem “with great joy” after seeing Jesus ascend to heaven (Luke 24:52). The repetition of ὑποστρέφω again emphasizes the community over the individuals. These followers of Jesus always recongregate after revelatory experiences, discussing these events together, and jointly becoming convicted about the events of the resurrection.<sup>174</sup>

Also, these three revelatory experiences in Luke 24 add details either of the believers’ response to Jesus’ resurrection. Luke mentions both the report they tell

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<sup>171</sup> W. Marxen, *Die Auferstehung Jesus als historisches und als theologisches Problem* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1965), 22, highlights the way these resurrection accounts validated the apostles to future generations of believers as well.

<sup>172</sup> Peter is the one exception, who runs to visit the tomb after the women share the report with the disciples (24:12).

<sup>173</sup> Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, 1178.

<sup>174</sup> D. T. Prince, “The ‘Ghost’ of Jesus: Luke 24 in Light of Ancient Narratives and Post-Mortem Apparitions,” *JSNT* 29 (2007): 287–301, 297, argues that Luke’s language describing Jesus’ resurrection is purposely disorienting “in order to reconfigure the traditions known to the author . . . in light of the disciples’ extraordinary experiences of the resurrected Jesus. . . . [to] display the breadth and magnitude of Jesus’ resurrected presence.”

others and also the great joy with which they worship Jesus together after the ascension, “blessing God” upon their return to Jerusalem (Luke 24:9, 34, 52–53, ἀπήγγειλαν ταῦτα πάντα . . . λέγοντας ὅτι ὄντως ἠγέρθη ὁ κύριος. . . . Καὶ αὐτοὶ προσκυνήσαντες . . . μετὰ χαρᾶς μεγάλης . . . εὐλογοῦντες τὸν θεόν). Luke 24:30 and 35 add another notable detail. The Emmaus travelers identify Jesus as he breaks bread with them. Of the post-meal context of this response, Dodd says, “The recognition of the Lord at table carries a significant suggestion to a community which made the ‘breaking of bread’ the centre of its fellowship.”<sup>175</sup> Perrin follows by emphasizing even the religious dimension of this act of Jesus for early Christians: “Luke is telling his readers that the risen Lord can be known to them, as he became known to these two disciples, in the eucharist.”<sup>176</sup> The unified recognition of Jesus by these men in the context of a community ritual was a significant gesture of the importance of community in Luke’s Gospel.

The above emphasis of the community of faith suggests that the whole company of Jesus’ followers in Luke 24 rallies around these revelatory acts of God as Luke’s first volume comes to a close. Unlike his Markan *Vorlage*, which only implies an appearance of Jesus to the disciples in Galilee, Luke makes the witnessing, conviction, and the spread of the news an important bridge to his second volume. For this reason, the communal activity, response, return, and report of all parties following these revelatory acts of God highlight the resurgence of Luke’s believing community.

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<sup>175</sup> C. H. Dodd, “The Appearances of the Risen Christ: An Essay in Form-Criticism of the Gospels,” in *Studies in the Gospels*, ed. D. E. Nineham (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955), 14.

<sup>176</sup> N. Perrin, *The Resurrection Narratives* (London: SCM, 1977), 68.

### Summary of Responses to the Resurrection Appearances

“Only an issue of urgency and importance deserves the amount of attention given in Luke 24 to the revelation to the disciples of the necessity of Jesus’ suffering and resurrection.”<sup>177</sup> But it is not only the topic of Jesus’ death and resurrection that are attended to in Luke 24, but also the disciples’ *comprehension* of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Luke 24 has a number of statements of reproof for the negative responses of Jesus’ followers. However, Luke uses these responses to show the development of their reverence for the risen Jesus, placing their responses on a spectrum in Luke 24 as characters come to a proper understanding of Jesus in “stages.” Jesus’ followers in Luke 24 are also ignorant of the implications of what he said during his earthly ministry about the necessity of his death and resurrection. The above “stages” of reception to Jesus in Luke 24 are reinforced by the synecdochic references to “eyes,” “hearts,” and “minds” of Jesus’ followers. This “illumination” of Jesus’ followers gives way to a revitalized community of faith, which is corporately given the task of taking the gospel of Jesus to “all nations.”

#### *Luke 24 in Context of the Entire Gospel*

Luke 10:21–22 contains the prayer of Jesus in which he declares the revelatory authority given him by God. Luke’s version of this material differs substantially only in its introduction, in which Luke writes, ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ ὥρᾳ ἡγαλλιάσατο ἐν τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἁγίῳ καὶ εἶπεν. . . . (Luke 10:21).<sup>178</sup> Jesus’ admission and rejoicing in Luke’s Gospel over God’s “hiding” (ἀπέκρυψας) in some cases and “revealing”

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<sup>177</sup> Tannehill, *Unity*, 278.

<sup>178</sup> De Long, *Surprised*, 216, makes much of the Lukan idiosyncrasy of adding language of “joy in the Holy Spirit.”

(ἀπεκάλυψας) in others is a theme that resurfaces in Luke 24 as well (see Luke 24:16, 31).<sup>179</sup>

Luke 10:22 goes on to record Jesus' statement that "all things" are given him by God (πάντα μοι παρεδόθη ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρός μου, καὶ οὐδεὶς γινώσκει τίς ἐστὶν ὁ υἱὸς εἰ μὴ ὁ πατήρ, καὶ τίς ἐστὶν ὁ πατήρ εἰ μὴ ὁ υἱὸς καὶ ὃ ἔαν βούληται ὁ υἱὸς ἀποκαλύψει). Commentators have certainly run the gamut of suggestions to explain the referent of πάντα.<sup>180</sup> Without any formal investigation into the meaning of πάντα, Jesus' statement highlights his participation in God's work in hiding and revealing the knowledge of the son and the father. Evans says, "Since everything has been resigned by the Father to the Son the latter is the sole agent of revelation."<sup>181</sup> Thus, the passive verbs in Luke 24:16, 31 do not specify who the actor is, but this earlier passage in Luke 10 places Jesus at the center of God's revelatory activity and Jesus can therefore be understood as the one who closes and opens the eyes of the travelers.

The above interpretation of Luke 10:21–22 sheds further light in the preceding verses. If Jesus himself sees "Satan fall from heaven" (Luke 10:18, ἐθεώρουν τὸν σατανᾶν ὡς ἀστραπὴν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ πεσόντα) then his praise that God has revealed these things to children is a praise of Jesus' meditational role in revealing these things. That is, the things that Jesus praises God for revealing are the same that God has just revealed to Jesus. Bird provides a helpful discussion of Luke 10:18 as relates to the sending out of the disciples.<sup>182</sup> However, the other dimension of Jesus' equipping for mission referenced by 10:18 is his authority in revealing the things of God, which

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<sup>179</sup> A. Plummer, *The Gospel According to St. Luke, ICC* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1905), 281. Also noted by D. Crump, *Jesus the Intercessor*, WUNT 2.49 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 53, and De Long, *Surprised*, 217.

<sup>180</sup> Crump, *Intercessor*, 56–57, outlines 15 of the more popular interpretive options with their adherents.

<sup>181</sup> Evans, *Luke*, 461.

<sup>182</sup> M. Bird, "Mission as an Apocalyptic Event: Reflections on Luke 10:18 and Mark 13:10," *EQ* 76 (2004): 117–34. See also the discussion in H. C. Kee, *Miracle in the Early Christian World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 207, and Nolland, *Luke*, 566.

Jesus now gives to the disciples as well. Thus, as God reveals and conceals, he does so in Jesus to whom he has just given revelatory authority and who gives such authority to whomever he wishes.

## Conclusion to Luke's Gospel

Luke's Gospel begins with the largest and most complex burst of revelatory events of the four Gospels, as angels announce Jesus and his forerunner. These revelatory events elicit a full response from Zechariah, Mary, and the shepherds as well, but only after Zechariah is chastised for unbelief in the presence of Gabriel. The responses of Zechariah and Mary in the "Benedictus" and "Magnificat" illustrate as full a level of comprehension of the revelatory phenomena as in any other revelatory experience in the Gospels. In fact, their responses go beyond the messages that Gabriel brings them, and Zechariah's is a result of a subsequent "filling" of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus' baptism event with the Holy Spirit's descent and the voice from heaven declares his beloved and chosen status is no less fantastic but certainly is more simple in its narrative presentation. Jesus sees the events and only later responds to them in the desert temptation with Satan. At the transfiguration, however, Jesus' role in revelation begins to change and his statement in Luke 10:21–22 indicates as much. These two texts suggest that Jesus is becoming part of the revelation as he participates in the vision. As God exhorts the disciples to "listen to him," Jesus himself declares that all revelatory prerogatives have been given to him by God (Luke 10:21–22). Thus, Jesus assumes some of the authority to reveal what only God and his emissaries possess prior to this point. Jesus is no longer simply the object or focus of revelation—Jesus now superintends revelation on God's behalf.

The crucifixion scene offers an example of the above “transfer of authority” as Jesus is crucified. The revelatory events of the crucifixion come and go without much notice from the characters in the story. The three hours of darkness in particular are not specifically mentioned at all by the witnesses, yet the crowds who depart “beating their breasts” are likely responding to at least one of the revelatory phenomena.<sup>183</sup> In the same context with all these revelatory acts of God, the sight of Jesus dying on the cross is what deeply moves the centurion, who becomes a devotee of Jesus as he “glorifies God” after experiencing the way in which Jesus dies.

Luke 24 concludes the Gospel with two examples in which Jesus’ own revelatory initiative is required to further produce reverence for him in his followers. First, the angels appear to the women to announce Jesus’ resurrection and the women respond positively to the event and tell the disciples, who do not believe them. Then, the risen Jesus himself appears to the two Emmaus walkers and later to the disciples, and in both cases Jesus’ followers do not express reverence for him until he opens their eyes, hearts, and minds to understand him through the Scriptures.<sup>184</sup> These revelatory acts of God show that even phenomenal or miraculous events themselves are sometimes not enough to produce reverence for Jesus until the risen Jesus himself appears and makes himself known.

In sum, the conclusions offered from this research on the revelatory acts of God in Luke’s Gospel are as follows:

- 1. As in the other Synoptic Gospels, Luke evidences a transfer of revelatory authority from God to Jesus as the narrative develops.** Luke demonstrates this differently than Mark or Matthew, as his resurrection scene, for example, is

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<sup>183</sup> The tearing of the veil would not have been visible from Golgatha.

<sup>184</sup> That is, until Jesus either performs this work there in the context (as with the Emmaus walkers) or his previous predictions about his death and resurrection are invoked (as in the case of the angels’ words to the women).

much more explicit about Jesus' own role in prompting reverential responses to himself in the hearts of his followers.

2. **Lukan revelatory events are themselves a conduit for transformation.** That is, in Luke's Gospel we see *fuller* (and perhaps more enthusiastic) responses of reverence for Jesus after revelatory experiences than we do in the other Synoptic Gospels. Luke's reliance on the Holy Spirit and his penchant for religious experience in general is doubtless a reason for this difference.
3. **Even given point 2 above, Lukan revelatory acts of God are more explicit about requiring subsequent revelatory enabling as well.** In his commentary on Luke 24, Green says, "events require interpretation."<sup>185</sup> But Luke's resurrection chapter in particular suggests this is better rephrased as, "events and interpretations require subsequent 'opening' of the eyes" in order to prompt a response of reverence for Jesus. Although this extra enablement is only clear in Luke 24, the presence of these details represent a pronounced addition to the Lukan revelatory material.
4. **Luke promises a further revelatory act of God in the coming of the Spirit.** Luke's "Great Commission" (Luke 24:46–49) contains the Matthew-esque reference to preaching and teaching, but also adds with this the promise of the Holy Spirit to come. Although Matthew's promise guarantees Jesus' enduring presence, Luke's phrasing is more "experiential" in its reference to the "power from on high" that will "come" at a specific point in time.

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<sup>185</sup> Green, *Luke*, 836, also cites Dillon, *Eye-Witnesses*, 19-20 and Schubert, "Structure and Significance," 167–68.

## CHAPTER 4

# Revelatory Acts of God in John

This chapter will investigate the narrative relationship in John's Gospel between the revelatory acts of God and characters' attitudes toward Jesus.<sup>1</sup> John deploys fewer revelatory events than do Mark, Matthew, or Luke. Therefore the differences in usage between John and the Synoptics will also be highlighted. This chapter will examine the (1) content of Johannine revelatory acts of God, (2) the responses of characters to these events, and (3) the subsequent context of these events in the Gospel to determine how John depicts the relationship between revelatory experiences and characters' reverence for Jesus.

### *Statistical Assessment of Religious Experience in John*

The statistical analysis below will show that the length and concentration of Johannine religious experience accounts and how the revelatory acts of God are

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<sup>1</sup> By "revelatory acts of God," I mean passages in John's Gospel in which God discloses himself by visionary or auditory means, which include those scenes in which the risen Jesus appears to the disciples. Johannine scholars may object to the idea that the resurrection in John is one of God's revelatory acts given John 2:19; 10:18. However, C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 374, highlights the element of "paradox" in John's Gospel, that Jesus' Passion can be at once ascribed to both Jesus and God. Furthermore, because Jesus is depicted as dead and incapacitated on the cross [John 19:29, 34], this thesis maintains that Jesus' *authority have himself raised from the dead by God* is that to which 10:18 refers (thus the justification for including the resurrection as a Johannine "revelatory act of God").

Also, it should be noted that "revelatory acts of God" is not synonymous with "signs" (σημεῖον) nor should it necessarily be recalled at each of John's uses of φανερώω. For more detail on key terms in this thesis, see "Introduction."



portrayed differently than those of the Synoptics.<sup>2</sup> Of John's 818 verses, 227 (27.8%) recount religious experiences<sup>3</sup> and 48 verses (5.9%) recount revelatory acts of God.<sup>4</sup> These statistics themselves do not show a marked difference between John and the Synoptics.

However, the concentration of religious and revelatory experience accounts in John differs sharply from those of the Synoptics. John has only one-third the number of religious experience accounts, and therefore each of these accounts is significantly longer than the average Synoptic religious experience account. That is, John's accounts are both fewer and longer than those in the Synoptics. The Fourth Gospel records only 9 religious experiences prior to the resurrection<sup>5</sup> and John's religious experience accounts average 20 verses in length prior to the resurrection.<sup>6</sup>

By comparison, Mark, Matthew, and Luke all contain rather terse religious experience accounts, with triple the number of accounts that are less than half the length on average. Mark contains 27 pre-resurrection religious experiences.<sup>7</sup> On

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<sup>2</sup> See the *Methodology* section of the "Introduction" for a full explanation of the criteria used for including and excluding pericopae from these statistics.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew's 1068 verses contain 219 (20.5%) in religious experience accounts, Mark's 661 has 232 religious experience verses (35.1%), and Luke's 1149 verses contain 320 (27.9%) in religious experience accounts. All of these tallies utilize the same criteria and are not used to base the conclusions of this thesis. These statistics only serve to show the broad similarities and differences in the Gospel material.

<sup>4</sup> Revelatory experiences occur with similar frequency to Matthew's 58 of 1068 verses (5.4%) and Mark's 27 of 661 verses (4.1%). In Luke's Gospel, 112 of 1149 verses (9.8%) are in revelatory experience accounts. NB: The verse total for John's Gospel does not include 5:4 (missing in the NA27) or 7:53–8:11.

<sup>5</sup> Because the differences between John and the Synoptics on this point has specifically to do with the pre-resurrection religious experience accounts, these statistics will compare the four Gospels not including their resurrection scenes. However, this chapter will address revelatory experiences in all of John's Gospel.

Religious experiences in John prior to the resurrection are as follows: 2:1–11, Jesus turns water into wine at Cana; 4:1–30, 39–42, Jesus miraculously tells the Samaritan about her past; 4:46–52, Jesus heals the royal official's son; 5:1–18, Jesus heals by the pool of Bethesda; 6:1–14, Jesus feeds the 5,000; 6:16–21, Jesus walks on water; 9:1–41, Jesus heals the man born blind; 11:1–46, Jesus raises Lazarus; 12:27–30, God's voice speaks from heaven.

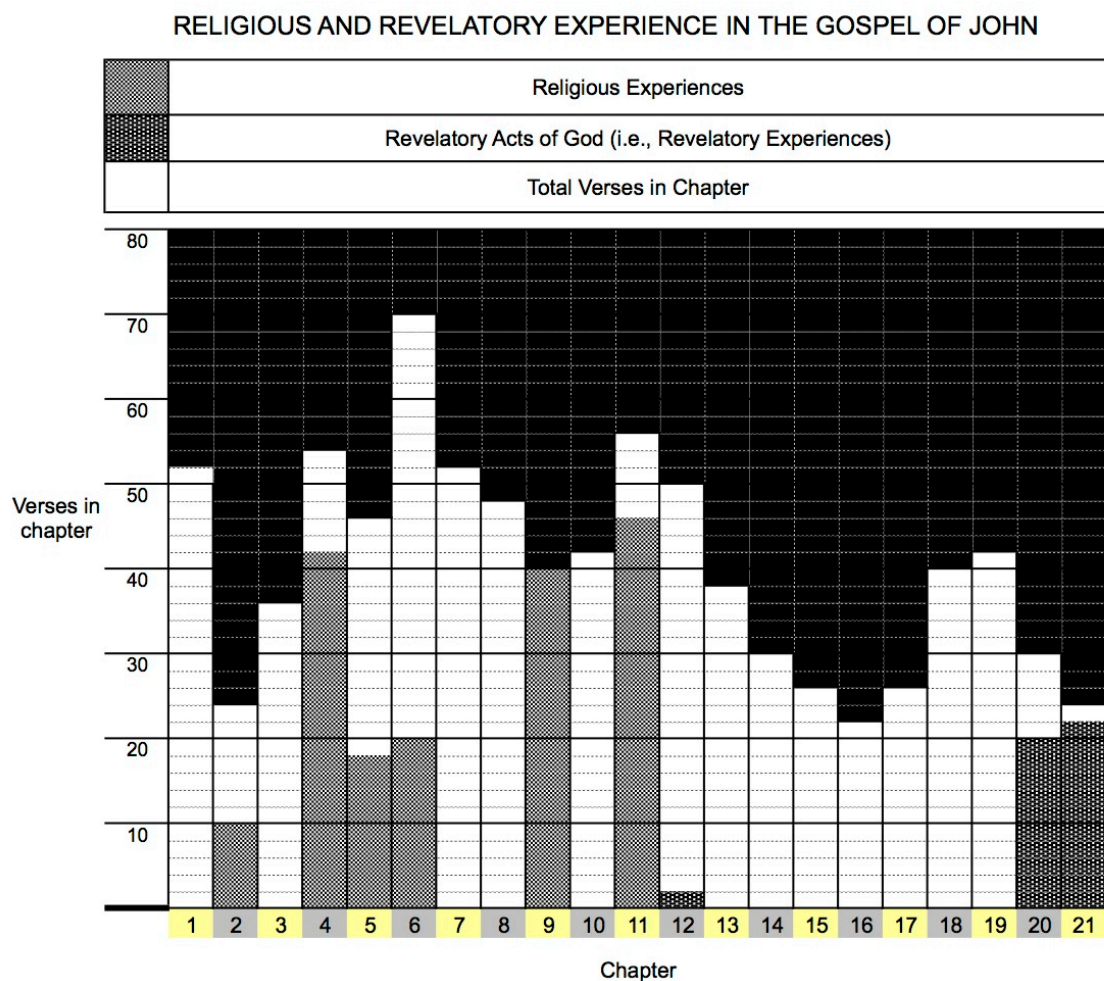
<sup>6</sup> The reason I tally pre-resurrection religious experiences is because all four Gospels have revelatory accounts connected to the resurrection. The differences between these accounts will be addressed, but the differences in the style of Johannine religious experiences prior to the resurrection (fewer accounts that are much longer in length) are the focus of this comparison.

<sup>7</sup> Markan religious experience accounts are listed in footnote 2 of the chapter on Mark.

average, Mark’s religious experience accounts are 8 verses long. Matthew’s Gospel contains as many religious experience accounts as Luke (34 each).<sup>8</sup> Luke’s accounts average 8 verses each in length, whereas Matthew’s average 6 verses each in length.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, the religious experience accounts in the Synoptic Gospels are on average less than half the length of those in John. John’s Gospel involves fewer of these accounts and provides the reader with longer explanations of Jesus in each. Figure 1 below illustrates this tendency of the Fourth Gospel. Compared to the Synoptics, John contains fewer, but longer, religious experiences accounts (religious experiences in *light grey* and revelatory acts of God in *dark grey*).

**Figure 1. Distribution of Religious and Revelatory Experience in Luke<sup>10</sup>**



<sup>8</sup> Matthean religious experience accounts are listed in footnote 4 of the chapter on Matthew.

<sup>9</sup> Lukan religious experience accounts are listed in footnote 4 of the chapter on Luke.

<sup>10</sup> Compare the other charts on the following pages: Mark, 17; Matthew, 66; Luke, 130.

John also distributes his revelatory accounts differently than do the Synoptics.<sup>11</sup> John contains only one revelatory act of God prior to Jesus' resurrection (John 12:27–30). Unlike each of the Synoptics, which contain a majority of revelatory experiences prior to the resurrection account,<sup>12</sup> 92% of John's revelatory material occurs in the resurrection narrative. That is, only 8% of John's revelatory material occurs prior to the resurrection.<sup>13</sup> John's Gospel records only one revelatory event prior to the resurrection of Jesus, where the divine voice speaks to Jesus (John 12:27–30).<sup>14</sup>

The above statistics have several implications. First, John's fewer-but-longer religious experiences accounts may be crafted this way to allow Jesus more time to teach in the context of the religious experiences. That is, the religious experiences become less important and Jesus' explanation of it more so. Second, John is as interested in Jesus' own ability to speak for himself rather than letting the miracles speak for him. In other words, John places less of a burden on religious experiences to reveal who Jesus is than he does on Jesus' own words. Third, the bulk of *revelatory* events occurring after the resurrection shows that revelatory acts of God prior to the resurrection are of little interest to the author. With the purpose of John's Gospel so explicitly stated (20:30–31), the reservation of revelatory acts of God until the end

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<sup>11</sup> Religious experience is generally as prevalent in John as in the Synoptic Gospels, in that all four canonical Gospels contain between 20% and 35% religious experience accounts. Details on these statistics are included in the "Survey and Assessment" section.

<sup>12</sup> Fifty-one of Matthew's 66 total revelatory experience verses (77%) are prior to the resurrection. Nineteen of Mark's 27 total revelatory experience verses (70%) are prior to the resurrection account. And 59 of Luke's 112 revelatory experience verses (53%) occur prior to the resurrection.

<sup>13</sup> The criteria for these statistics are listed in the introduction. This thesis assumes the general, literary independence of John from the Synoptics (affirmed by R. Bultmann, R. E. Brown, R. Schnackenburg, L. Morris, J. N. Sanders & B. A. Mastin, B. Lindars, and C. H. Dodd). I say "general" because I do not discount the idea that John may have been aware of the Synoptic tradition J. R. Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 29. That is, as Smith has advocated, the question of the mode of the relationship should remain open in principle (P. Gardner Smith, *Saint John and the Synoptic Gospels* [Cambridge: CUP, 1938], 443–44).

<sup>14</sup> The Baptist's second-hand reference to Jesus' baptism in John 1:32–34 is not included because the event is *John's recollection* of what he saw (very similar to Jesus' recollection in Luke 10:18 "I was seeing Satan, as lightning, falling from heaven). See footnote 2 of the introduction.

suggests that resurrection revelatory acts of God are those that most effectively produce faith in Jesus. These hypotheses will be explored further in the sections below.

### *Revelatory Experience and the Structure of John*

The structure of John's Gospel discussed below uses the pre-Easter revelatory act of God in John 12:27–30 as a hinge for the Gospel, at which point Jesus hides himself until after the resurrection. In this way, John's Gospel uses John 12:27–30 as a “last call” to the crowds before Jesus' pre-Easter ministry ends.

Many interpreters of John's Gospel have accepted Brown's division of John into two halves, the first being the “Book of Signs” (John 1:19–12:50) and the second being the “Book of Glory” (John 13:1–20:31).<sup>15</sup> Brown's outline helpfully distinguishes between the miraculous signs of Jesus and the glory of his Passion no doubt accounts for its widespread acceptance. However, at points this outline is too simplistic to account for all the data<sup>16</sup> and the “signs/glory” distinction leaves out the importance of testimony in John's Gospel. For this reason, Michaels' outline better accounts for both the major themes and literary components of John's Gospel and even has a Bultmannian ring to it:

- Preamble (John 1:1–5)
- Testimony of John (John 1:6–3:30)
- Jesus' Self-Revelation to the World (John 4:1–12:43)
- (Transition) Jesus' Testimony about himself (John 12:44–50)

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<sup>15</sup> R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John: I–XII*, AB (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), cxxxvii–cxxxix; Brown calls John 1:1–18 the prologue and John 21:1–25 the epilogue. John's Gospel does not follow the general North-to-South geographical structure of the Synoptics. Nevertheless, R. Bauckham, *Testimony of the Beloved Disciple* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2007), 95–112, shows that John still seems to have a keen awareness of topography in his Gospel. Therefore, one cannot explain the structural difference between John and the Synoptics simply by appealing to geographical sensitivities. As Michaels, *John*, 30, says, “if John's Gospel is familiar with the so-called Markan outline . . . then it has distanced itself from that outline in conspicuous ways.”

<sup>16</sup> “Signs” and “glory” are not mutually exclusive concepts in John. And John 20:30–31 expressly states that the narrative of Jesus' “signs” carries on throughout the entire Gospel.

- Jesus' Self-Revelation to the Disciples (John 13:1–16:33)  
(Transition) Jesus' prayer (John 17:1–26)
- Verification of Jesus' Self-Revelation (John 18:1–21:25)<sup>17</sup>

The above structure provides a useful starting place for research on revelatory events in the Fourth Gospel. The “revelation about Jesus” is an adequate concept on which to structure the Gospel. First, John's Gospel testifies that “Jesus the Revealer” who discloses himself to the world and to his disciples.<sup>18</sup> Within these revelatory sections, however, revelatory acts of God play a surprisingly small role until the final two chapters.

Prior to the resurrection of Jesus in John 20–21, John records only one revelatory event (John 12:27–30),<sup>19</sup> during which Jesus prays to the father and hears the divine voice in reply. This brief episode is followed by Jesus' decision to go into hiding (John 12:36) and the unbelief of the crowds in the face of Jesus' “many signs” (John 12:37, 38–40). Thus, the sole pre-Easter revelatory experience of 12:27–30 is a turning point in John's Gospel,<sup>20</sup> after which Jesus ends his public ministry and focuses on his self-revelation to the disciples.

## Revelatory Acts of God in John's Gospel

The sections below will analyze the revelatory acts of God of John's Gospel and the narrative role of these events for producing reverence for Jesus. It will be argued that revelatory acts of God in John's Gospel do not have a 1-to-1 correlation with

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<sup>17</sup> Michaels, *John*, 36, also cites *Ecclesiastical History* 3.24.12–13; LCL, 1.253–55, as a basis by which he departs from Brown's outline.

<sup>18</sup> Bultmann, *John*.

<sup>19</sup> John also records one second-hand reference to a revelatory event in 1:32–34, where John recounts his experience watching the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus and being told by God that Jesus is his Son.

<sup>20</sup> Potentially John 11–12 both represent a turning point in John's Gospel, in which Lazarus is raised and chapter 12 continues to reflect on Lazarus' resurrection as God's voice appears in 12:27–30.

reverence for Jesus, but rather personal interaction with the risen Christ alone is decisive for changing characters' views of Jesus. The following sections will address the (1) content of John's revelatory acts of God, the (2) corresponding responses of the witnesses, and (3) the responses of characters in the context subsequent to the event.

## Jesus Prays and God Speaks (John 12:27–30)

God's response to Jesus' prayer in John 12:27–30 offers a significant window into the correspondence between revelatory experience and reverence for Jesus. Not only do the crowds not believe in Jesus after this experience, they do not even correctly perceive the phenomenon itself.<sup>21</sup> Jesus' assertion that the voice comes for the crowd's sake shows that even in the most favorable instances, the crowds of John's Gospel will not follow Jesus on their own.

### *Content of John 12:27–30*

The revelatory act of God in John 12:27–30 consists of a single sentence and asserts the way in which God and Jesus mutually glorify each other. As the voice of God responds to Jesus: "I glorified and will glorify again" (John 12:28, καὶ ἐδόξασα καὶ πάλιν δοξάσω),<sup>22</sup> this divine statement is the first and only in John's Gospel that uses

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<sup>21</sup> Several later manuscripts replace "your name" with "your son" (L X f<sup>1.13</sup> 33 1071 1241 *al* have σου τον υιον) or "my name" (B has μου τὸ ὄνομα). Bezae even conflates John 17:5 with this verse, adding ἐν τῇ δόξῃ ἣ εἶχον παρὰ σοί πρὸ τοῦ τὸν κόσμον γενέσθαι. Καὶ ἐγένετο. . . . See B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 202, and C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John* (London: SPCK, 1962), 354.

<sup>22</sup> Brown, *John I–XII*, 467, says that this voice is an example of the rabbinic *bath qôl* ("daughter of the voice"). Brown, however, says that the *bat qôl* is an insufficient reference regarding the voice of God at Jesus' baptism in the Synoptics and makes no case for why he sees this voice as being any different.

God's voice.<sup>23</sup> Unlike the Synoptics, John does not include either the baptism or transfiguration scene in which God declares Jesus' sonship.<sup>24</sup> The content of John's only pre-resurrection revelatory event makes no reference to any christological title of Jesus although Evans makes the case that Isaiah's Servant Song is alluded to in the name-glory connection made in John 12:28.<sup>25</sup> Still, the voice only declares God's past glorification of his name and his intent to bring his name glory in the future.<sup>26</sup>

Commentators agree that these glorifications refer to the glory God receives through Jesus' life and future Passion (cf. John 11:40; 17:4-5).<sup>27</sup> Although the voice from heaven does not use a christological title, it does make three significant christological statements, as cited by Bultmann. First, the voice portrays Jesus as the mediator of God's glory to the world in John's Gospel. That is, God has made Jesus "the Revealer" and God glorifies his own name through what Jesus has revealed in his life. Thus, since God promises to glorify further his own name in the future, this indicates that Jesus will continue to be the Revealer appointed by God.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Michaels, *John*, 694.

<sup>24</sup> Bultmann, *John*, 428 n. 1, hears echoes of the Synoptic transfiguration in John 12:27–30, as do E. C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel* [London: Faber and Faber, 1947], 425 and Michaels, *John*, 694. However, the only commonality is the presence of God and Jesus. Nothing else in the accounts is parallel. Furthermore, the one Johannine revelatory reference that is parallel to a Synoptic account is the Baptist's reference to Jesus' baptism in 1:32–34. Yet John clearly distances his own account from the Synoptic version, if he had the Synoptic version. Thus, the distance between these obviously parallel accounts suggests even more distance between John 12:27–30 and the transfiguration of the Synoptics. As B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, NCB (London: Oliphants, 1972), 432, says, these words "bear no relation to the divine utterance" at the transfiguration.

<sup>25</sup> C. A. Evans, "The Voice from Heaven: A Note on John 12:28," *CBQ* 43 (1981): 405–408, 407. This position is later taken up by J. Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 470–71 n. 25.

<sup>26</sup> R. A. Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 194, calls this the "Johannine Gesthemane."

<sup>27</sup> Dodd, *Interpretation*, 373; Ashton, *Fourth Gospel*, 470; A. T. Lincoln, *The Gospel According to St John*, BNTC (London: Continuum, 2005), 352; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 36, WBC (Waco: Word, 1999), 212; Barrett, *John*, 355; E. Haenchen, *John 2*, trans. R. W. Funk, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 97; Lindars, *John*, 432.

<sup>28</sup> R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 429.

Second, the voice assumes that, “the entire work of Jesus serves the revelation” of God.<sup>29</sup> In other words, Jesus’ life is an accurate expression of God to the people among whom Jesus lives. Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection illustrate what is glorifying to Jesus. As Burridge notes, John shows “how Jesus reflects and shares God’s glory not just on occasion, but always.”<sup>30</sup>

Third, Bultmann notes the interconnectedness of Jesus’ glory with that of God. He says, “*the δόξα of the Father and the δόξα of the Son are bound to each other*. For if the Father is glorified through the work of the Son . . . so at the same time the Son is glorified as the Revealer.”<sup>31</sup> In writing about the Son’s glorification as the “Revealer,” Bultmann means that Jesus participates in the divine glory as the bearer of it.

Therefore, on the level of “content,” this revelatory act places the revelation of God in the realm of Jesus’ life and ministry. In other words, Jesus in John’s Gospel reveals God’s glory, both in the miracles he performs and later in his crucifixion and resurrection. As Jesus states in John 12:45, “whoever has seen me sees him who sent me.” How the crowds respond will be the next matter to address.

### *Responses of the Crowd and Jesus*

#### **The Crowd’s Ignorance and Jesus’ Confusing Explanation (John 12:29–30)**

Contrary to Culpepper, who simply says that this sign is “subject to various interpretations,” the crowd’s reaction to the voice does not correctly perceive the voice or understand what the voice says.<sup>32</sup> After the voice speaks, John uses the logical conjunction οὖν to emphasize the people’s acknowledgement that something unusual occurs. However, the explanation they provide is incorrect—some of the

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<sup>29</sup> Bultmann, *John*, 429.

<sup>30</sup> R. A. Burridge, *John*, PBC (Oxford: Bible Reading Fellowship, 1998), 158.

<sup>31</sup> Bultmann, *John*, 429, italics original; Hoskyns, *Fourth*, 425.

<sup>32</sup> Culpepper, *John*, 195.



crowd says the voice is thunder and others that an angel spoke to Jesus (John 12:29, ὁ οὖν ὄχλος ὁ ἐστὼς καὶ ἀκούσας ἔλεγεν βροντὴν γεγονέναι, ἄλλοι ἔλεγον· ἄγγελος αὐτῷ λελάληκεν). Neither of these two responses of the crowd shows that they correctly perceive the phenomenon in the most basic sense—that God has spoken to Jesus.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, some of the crowd even fail to recognize that words are spoken!<sup>34</sup>

Paradoxically, Jesus replies with the claim that the people who did not understand the voice are the voice’s intended audience (John 12:30, οὐ δι’ ἐμὲ ἡ φωνὴ αὕτη γέγονεν ἀλλὰ δι’ ὑμᾶς).<sup>35</sup> Therefore, this scene leaves scholars with the awkward tension between the purpose of the revelatory act of God (to speak to the people) and the people’s inability to receive the intended message.<sup>36</sup> Two interpretive options remain: either God in the narrative is powerless to do what he intends in the narrative or the people are unable to correctly perceive the things of God despite his overtures.<sup>37</sup> Bennema’s work on Johannine epistemology discusses “John’s dualistic worldview . . . [in which] all people belong naturally to the realm below (John 3:6; 8:23) The person who is ‘from below’ . . . does not have the necessary epistemic ‘sight’ that is needed to enter into the realm above (3:3).”<sup>38</sup> Moloney infers that “the basis of the failure lies in the crowd’s attempt to understand the noise as a mediation. . . The mystery of Jesus can only be understood by those who are prepared to accept that he is *from God* (cf. 1:1–5), and that his story is determined by his origins and his

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<sup>33</sup> Hoskyns, *Fourth*, 426.

<sup>34</sup> Barrett, *John*, 355.

<sup>35</sup> Haenchen, *John 2*, 97; Bultmann, *John*, 430.

<sup>36</sup> Barrett, *John*, 355, is the first of many commentators in the last half-century to express dismay at Jesus’ comment in 12:30.

<sup>37</sup> John provides a clear answer in the subsequent context, which is explained below (John 12:37–40).

<sup>38</sup> C. Bennema, “Christ, the Spirit and the Knowledge of God: A Study of Johannine Epistemology,” in *The Bible and Epistemology: Biblical Soundings on the Knowledge of God*, (eds.) M. Healy and R. Parry, 107–33 (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), 112. See also Haenchen, *John 2*, 97.

ongoing union with God.”<sup>39</sup> Meeks’ response is more nuanced when he writes about John as a whole, “The Fourth Gospel is content to leave unanswered the question how there could exist in ‘this work’ some persons who, by some pre-established harmony, could respond to the Stranger from the world above and thus become, like him, men ‘not of this world.’”<sup>40</sup>

What John makes plain, however, is that the revelatory act of God itself does not enable the crowd to appreciate God or Jesus.<sup>41</sup> The crowd does not realize what happens, and the revelatory phenomenon itself does not illumine them. In other words, “the Evangelist has again made clear, through his medium of the misunderstanding, how difficult such understanding is to man.”<sup>42</sup> Hurtado adds that John’s Gospel “typically portrays the responses of Jesus’ opponents as *culpable* misunderstandings and failure. . . . It is not simply an intellectual deficiency in these hearers.”<sup>43</sup>

### **Excursus: The Second-Hand Report of the Spirit’s Descent (John 1:32–34)**

This excursus uses John the Baptist’s second-hand report to show that revelatory experience alone is not intelligible and therefore does not produce faith in the characters within the narrative of the Fourth Gospel. The revelatory act of God recounted by John the Baptist in 1:32–34 portrays a strange dynamic—the vision is indecipherable to the Baptist before God provides an interpretation of the vision that generates belief in Jesus (John 1:33, καὶ γὰρ οὐκ ᾔδειν αὐτόν, ἀλλ’ . . .). Thus, the

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<sup>39</sup> F. J. Moloney, *Signs and Shadows: Reading John 5–12* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 354, 191, n. 50.

<sup>40</sup> W. Meeks, “Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism,” *JBL* 91 (1972): 44–72, 71.

<sup>41</sup> Bennema, “Epistemology,” 112, says, that John 12 “restates people’s inability to ‘see’ and know God as epistemic blindness and closed hearts (i.e., the minds of people are closed to cognitive perception and understanding).”

<sup>42</sup> Bultmann, *John*, 430.

<sup>43</sup> L. W. Hurtado, “Remembering and Revelation: The Historic and Glorified Jesus in the Gospel of John,” in *Israel’s God and Rebecca’s Children*, eds. D. B. Capes, A. D. DeConick, H. K. Bond, and T. Miller, 195–214 (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 198.

Baptist's inability to interpret the descent of the Spirit onto Jesus shows that this revelatory act of God *alone* is powerless apart from divine illumination.<sup>44</sup>

In John 1:32–34, John the Baptist attributes his ability to correctly identify Jesus to God's explanation of the revelatory act. That is, the revelatory event in this passage is not self-explanatory. John 1:32–33 says, Καὶ ἐμαρτύρησεν Ἰωάννης λέγων ὅτι τεθέαμαι τὸ πνεῦμα καταβαῖνον ὡς περιστερὰν ἐξ οὐρανοῦ καὶ ἔμεινεν ἐπ' αὐτόν. κἀγὼ οὐκ ᾔδην αὐτόν. The Baptist says that the descent of the Spirit like a dove is not self-evident. Rather, he recalls the need for God's interpretation of the phenomenon (John 1:33–34, ἀλλ' ὁ πέμψας με βαπτίζειν ἐν ὕδατι ἐκεῖνός μοι εἶπεν· ἐφ' ὃν ἂν ἴδῃς τὸ πνεῦμα καταβαῖνον καὶ μένον ἐπ' αὐτόν, οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ βαπτίζων ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ. κἀγὼ ἑώρακα καὶ μεμαρτύρηκα ὅτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ).<sup>45</sup>

The Spirit's descent as a dove in John 1:32–34 first shows that John the Baptist does not use a Jewish or Hellenistic antecedent to understand the vision of the dove. Against much of the research on the Spirit's descent in the Synoptic baptism accounts, most of which asserts “ready-made” significance for the vision, John the Baptist

<sup>44</sup> Because John 1:32–34 is a *report* of a revelatory event, not the account of the event itself, this passage will not receive its own analysis in this thesis. See footnote 3 above and also the Introduction for a more complete description of *apparent* revelatory experience accounts that are not included in this formal analysis.

<sup>45</sup> Despite the fact that John's Gospel omits the baptism and transfiguration accounts, John has more interest in showing Jesus to be “God's Son” than any of the Synoptic Gospel. References to Jesus as the divine Son occur thirty-five times throughout the book: John 1:34, John the Baptist: οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ; 1:49, Nathanael: σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ; 3:16, self-reference: τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ ἔδωκεν; 3:17, self-reference: οὐ γὰρ ἀπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν υἱὸν εἰς τὸν κόσμον . . . ; 3:18, self-reference: εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ μονογενοῦς υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ; 3:35, self-reference: ὁ πατὴρ ἀγαπᾷ τὸν υἱόν; 3:36 (x2), self-reference: ὁ πιστεύων εἰς τὸν υἱὸν . . . ὁ δὲ ἀπειθῶν τῷ υἱῷ; 5:19–25 (x9), all self-references: ὁ υἱός . . . ὁ υἱός; 5:20: ὁ γὰρ πατὴρ φιλεῖ τὸν υἱόν; 5:21: ὁ υἱὸς οὗς θέλει ζωοποιεῖ; 5:22: δέδωκεν τῷ υἱῷ; 5:23 (x2): ἵνα πάντες τιμῶσι τὸν υἱόν . . . ὁ μὴ τιμῶν τὸν υἱόν . . . ; 5:25: οἱ νεκροὶ ἀκούσουσιν τῆς φωνῆς τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ; 5:26: οὕτως καὶ τῷ υἱῷ ἔδωκεν ζωὴν; 6:40, self-reference: πᾶς ὁ θεωρῶν τὸν υἱόν; 8:35–36 (x2), self-references: ὁ υἱὸς μένει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα . . . ἔάν οὖν ὁ υἱὸς ὑμᾶς ἐλευθερώσῃ; 10:36, self-reference: υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ εἰμι; 11:4, self-reference: ἵνα δοξασθῇ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ δι' αὐτῆς; 11:27, Martha: ναὶ κύριε, ἐγὼ πεπίστευκα ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἐρχόμενος; 14:13, self-reference: ἵνα δοξασθῇ ὁ πατὴρ ἐν τῷ υἱῷ; 17:1 (x2), self-references: δόξασόν σου τὸν υἱόν, ἵνα ὁ υἱὸς δοξάσῃ σέ; 19:7, the Jews: ὅτι υἱὸν θεοῦ ἑαυτὸν ἐποίησεν; 20:31, narrator: ἵνα πιστεύ[σ]ῃτε ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστιν ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ.

would not have known what the revelatory event means if God had not explained it to him.<sup>46</sup>

Second, God's revelatory act itself does not provide John with the knowledge necessary for understanding the dove in the moment the Spirit appears.<sup>47</sup> That is, the vision alone had no power to produce understanding. Rather, the Baptist needed the interpretation of "the one who sent him" to make sense of the descending Spirit.

Third, the Baptist's explanation *does* imply that he correctly perceives the descent of the Spirit itself, even if he does not know what to make of it. John 1:32–33 implies a chronology in which John sees the Spirit without knowing what it means, after which the voice provides an explanation.

Therefore, the Fourth Gospel's second hand account of the Baptist's revelatory experience further shows that these events are not accessible apart from subsequent illumination. Even though John the Baptist sees the vision, the Spirit's descent does not produce in him reverence for Jesus until God explains it.

### *Subsequent Context*

The subsequent context of John 12:27–30 acknowledges the crowd's inability to believe Jesus and establishes Jesus' life as an instrument for divine glorification. The explanation of the people's unbelief using Isaiah's prophecy about their "inability" (John 12:37–40, διὰ τοῦτο οὐκ ἠδύναντο πιστεύειν), places 12:27–30 in the realm of God's judgment. The context of 12:37–40 implies that the hardening of the people's

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<sup>46</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 79, recognizes the futility to try to propose a simple interpretive solution for the descent of the dove. In the appendix of this thesis, I interact with one of the more current and compelling proposals to explain the descending dove (the implications of which are not relevant for inclusion in the body of this project).

<sup>47</sup> G. Richter, "Zu den Taufferzählungen Mk 1:9–11 und Joh 1:32–34," *ZNW* 65 (1974): 43–56, 44–47, asks whether John's "dove" reference is adverbial ("like a dove") or adjectival ("being a dove") and he concludes the adverbial sense is the correct one.

heart comes as God's judgment on the people's response to Jesus. This is why John uses the conjunction "on account of this" (διὰ τοῦτο) to introduce their inability to believe (12:39, διὰ τοῦτο οὐκ ἠδύναντο πιστεύειν). Therefore, the Baptist's experience in 1:32-34 illustrates that unbelief is not the sole reason that revelatory acts of God are misunderstood in John, but unbelief is the factor in John 12:27-30.

Thus, the subsequent context of John 12:27-30 confirms the role of the people's unbelief for crippling their ability to perceive revelatory acts of God and respond positively to Jesus. The Synoptic Gospels also feature the stubborn unbelief of the crowds. However, the Synoptics do not credit the people's unbelief with their inability to respond to God's revelatory acts.

#### *Conclusion to John 12:27-30*

In this first revelatory act of God in John's Gospel, God speaks but the crowd neither understands nor correctly interprets the revelation. That is, the revelatory act of God in John 12:27-30 declares Jesus to be the instrument of God's glorification in the world.<sup>48</sup> God has "glorified" himself in Jesus and he will continue to do so thereafter.

However, the audience's confounded response explains the Gospel's lack of emphasis on revelatory acts of God. The crowd hears the voice of God, which is given for their sake, and they do not know that God speaks and cannot comprehend what God says. The subsequent context of this passage emphasizes the unbelief of the people that contributes to their ignorance of the revelatory event. The crowd's response in John 12:27-30 corresponds with that of John 1:32-34 in this way: in both cases, the revelatory phenomenon itself does not engender a reverence for Jesus, but rather are unintelligible to the audiences apart from subsequent interpretation.

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<sup>48</sup> Bultmann, *John*, 429.

## The Resurrection of Jesus

John 20–21 implies that personal interaction with the risen Jesus engenders reverence for him.<sup>49</sup> Mary’s interaction with Jesus, that of the disciples, and that of Thomas are all predicated on personal interaction with the risen Christ.<sup>50</sup> The following analysis will discuss (1) the content of these appearances, (2) the way audiences respond, and (3) the context subsequent to each event and the fit of the final chapters in the Gospel as a whole.

### *Content of the Revelatory Acts of God in John 20–21*

#### **1. Peace, Proof, and the Presence of Jesus (John 20:18–20, 21, 26–28)**

“The appearance to the disciples with Thomas in their company includes, like Luke’s story, the strongest possible emphasis upon the physical reality of the Lord’s risen body.”<sup>51</sup> This “emphasis upon the physical reality” of the resurrection can be specified, however, as John’s Gospel stresses the *personal interaction* with the risen Lord as the decisive factor for engendering favorable responses to Jesus.<sup>52</sup> These

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<sup>49</sup> Arguments have been made that establish John 21 as an “epilogue” that is part of the original edition of the Gospel. See P. S. Minear, “The Original Functions of John 21,” *JBL* 102 (1983): 85–93; Bauckham, *Testimony*, 271–84; F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 398; E. Ruckstuhl and P. Dschulnigg, *Stilkritik und Verfasserfrage im Johannesevangelium*, NTOA 17 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991); C. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John’s Gospel* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001), 272–73. The section below will address John 20–21 as a unified account of the resurrection appearances of Jesus.

<sup>50</sup> X. Léon Dufour, *Resurrection and the Message of Easter* (London: Chapman, 1974), 169, says that John’s resurrection account most closely resembles that of Matthew’s Gospel. But Dodd, *Interpretation*, 441, has trouble seeing a resemblance.

<sup>51</sup> C. F. Evans, *Resurrection and the New Testament*, SBT 12 (London: SCM, 1970), 117. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection*, 246, recognizes the tension between Gospel assertions of Jesus’ bodily resurrection and also accounts of him doing things that are physically impossible, like passing through walls. He says, “Traditions about *post-resurrection appearances* are ambiguous, however. Although in their present form most of these stories posit a bodily presence, almost without exception the stories contain elements that strain against such an interpretation.”

<sup>52</sup> For discussion on the place of the beloved disciple earlier in the chapter (John 20:8–9), see Farely, *Disciples*, 140–44 and B. Byrne, “The Faith of the Beloved Disciple and the Community in John 20,” *JSNT* 23 (1985): 83–97.

“personal interactions” do not have a fixed form, but all produce a reaction in the disciples that shows their recognition of and reverence for the risen Jesus.

In the garden, Jesus’ initiates this personal interaction with Mary by calling her name (John 20:16).<sup>53</sup> Bruce notes the effect this has on Mary, “his calling her by name was all that was needed . . . she found herself face to face with her living Lord.”<sup>54</sup> Carson acknowledges Mary’s blindness to Jesus, and yet the decisive turn at Jesus’ word, “whatever the cause of her blindness, the single word *Mary* . . . was enough to remove it.”<sup>55</sup> Mary responds to Jesus with full recognition, *ραββουνι*, indicating that she now believes he is alive.<sup>56</sup>

Jesus’ interaction with the disciples and Thomas uses “peace” greetings followed by invitations to examine his wounds.<sup>57</sup> Jesus’ appearances to the disciples and then to Thomas do not include an interlude in which the disciples see him (before

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<sup>53</sup> Challenging the long-standing consensus on Mary as a character, M. A. Beavis, “Reconsidering Mary of Bethany,” *CBQ* 74 (2012): 281–97, uses the *Gospel of Mary* to argue that Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene are a composite figure in the Gospels.

<sup>54</sup> Bruce, *John*, 389.

<sup>55</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, PNTCS (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 641.

<sup>56</sup> Jesus’ command that Mary not cling to him implies that the Spirit would soon take his place as the presence of God among his people. Even so, Jesus reveals that he will so depart to be with the Father. After the two disciples leave the tomb site, Mary remains weeping in the garden (20:11). Peering again into the tomb, she sees two angels, who question her sadness (20:12–13). As Mary turns, she encounters Jesus without realizing it. When she recognizes Jesus, he tells her not to “cling” to him (20:14–17, *μή μου ἄπτου*).

Jesus’ command not to cling to him is unique among the four Gospels. Some commentators explain that Jesus tells Mary to “stop clinging” to him because she needs to be freed up to tell others about his resurrection. C. S. Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity, 1993), 20:17–18. This solution is questionable, however, Jesus’ command seems to be rooted in his coming ascension, not Mary’s ability to spread the news (20:17, *οὐπω γὰρ ἀναβέβηκα πρὸς τὸν πατέρα*). As Lagrange remarks, “n’insiste pas pour me toucher . . . ce que tu diras à mes frères, afin qu’ils soient préparés mieux que tu ne l’as été à comprendre de quelle nature est ma présence” M.-J. Lagrange, *Évangile Selon Saint Jean* (Paris: Victor Lecoffre, 1927), 512. That is, Jesus’ implication is that his earthly presence is no longer needed. Jesus’ command to Mary may also imply that the Paraclete will have an increased role, as Jesus would soon give the Spirit to his followers. The Spirit will soon replace Jesus as the presence of God with his people. As Beasley-Murray concludes, “the Paraclete-Spirit . . . will take the place of Jesus and expound his revelation to them and enable them to carry out their mission” (Beasley-Murray, *John*, 377).

<sup>57</sup> Jesus’ greets the disciples with “peace” three times in John 20 (20:19, 21, 26) and the entire Gospel mentions “peace” only five times. “Peace to you” is a common Semitic greeting yet seems to have a special resonance in John. X. Léon Dufour, *Resurrection and the Message of Easter*, 184; Metzger, *Textual*, 160; Haenchen, *John 2*, 210; Lincoln, *John*, 497; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 379, “never had that ‘common word’ [‘Shalom’] been so filled with meaning as when Jesus uttered it on Easter evening.”

examining his wounds) without knowing who he is (as in Mary’s case). Rather, following both the greeting and the invitation to see his wounds, the disciples respond with joy (John 20:20, ἐχάρησαν οὖν οἱ μαθηταὶ ἰδόντες τὸν κύριον). The phrase ἐχάρησαν οὖν shows the disciples’ positive emotional response to the appearance and the reason for their joy, ἰδόντες τὸν κύριον, makes clear that the disciples recognize that he is physically standing before them.

Three observations concerning Jesus’ interaction with the disciples through the “peace” greeting and the invitation to examine his wounds are relevant for this thesis: First, John’s five “peace” references, and particularly the two prior to the resurrection, seem to indicate that his victory over the world in general is the factor that brings about peace in John’s Gospel (cf. John 14:27, 16:33, 20:19, 21, 26). John 16:33 mentions this specifically when Jesus says, ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν ἵνα ἐν ἐμοὶ εἰρήνην ἔχητε. ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ θλίψιν ἔχετε· ἀλλὰ θαρσεῖτε, ἐγὼ νενίκηκα τὸν κόσμον. Several commentators affirm the notion that “peace” in John is a reference to that which is brought about by Jesus “overcoming the world.” For example, Schnackenburg writes that the greeting “receives particular emphasis for the evangelist for the overcoming of [general] fear and confusion (cf. 14:27). It becomes an Easter greeting in a special sense, as the repetition in v. 21 suggests” and a symbol of the victory achieved by Jesus through his resurrection.<sup>58</sup> Thus, the “peace” greeting is probably more a broad statement about Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection rather than a specific statement about the giving of the Spirit in John 20:22 (contra Brown).<sup>59</sup>

Second, “peace” in John is issued by and comes from Jesus (John 14:27, 16:33, 20:19, 21, 26). John 14:27 is the Gospel’s first mention of “peace” in which Jesus

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<sup>58</sup> Schnackenburg, *John*, 323; Lincoln, *John*, 497; Moloney, *John*, 530–31.

<sup>59</sup> Moloney, *John*, 530–31, notices that two of the three “peace” greetings come as Jesus overcomes locked doors, “His presence despite the locked doors is an indication of his victory over the limitations that human circumstance would impose.”



says, Εἰρήνην ἀφίημι ὑμῖν, εἰρήνην τὴν ἐμὴν δίδωμι ὑμῖν. In this passage, Jesus mediates peace to his followers. John 16:33 is similarly clear as Jesus bases the “peace” statement on his victory over the world: ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν ἵνα ἐν ἐμοὶ εἰρήνην ἔχητε. ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ θλίψιν ἔχετε· ἀλλὰ θαρσεῖτε, ἐγὼ νενίκηκα τὸν κόσμον. The final three references to peace in John’s Gospel (John 20:19, 21, 26) are greetings at resurrection appearances of Jesus in which Jesus pronounces “peace” to his followers with three identical statements: εἰρήνη ὑμῖν. Thus, all the pronouncements of peace issue from Jesus, with Jesus as the source of the peace to which he refers.

Third, the resurrection “peace” greetings are paired with invitations to touch Jesus’ hands and side as evidence that Jesus is risen. That is, Jesus’ “peace” salutations offer physical proof of his victory over adversity and his consequent ability to offer peace to his followers. Jesus’ interaction with the disciples through these “peace” greetings is an integral part of his followers’ expressions of reverence for him.

## **2. Jesus Bestows the Life-Giving Spirit for Ministry (John 20:22–23)**

Scholars recognize the difficulty in Jesus’ commissioning of the disciple as he bestows on them the Holy Spirit. There is widespread disagreement about the nature of this giving and whether or not the Spirit in John 20:22 causes the disciples to believe in the risen Jesus.<sup>60</sup>

Regarding the nature of this bestowal of the Holy Spirit, this action (breathing + command to receive the Spirit) is often taken as the means by which Jesus’ followers

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<sup>60</sup> C. Bennema, “The Giving of the Spirit in John 19–20,” in *The Spirit and Christ in the New Testament and Christian Theology*, (eds.) I. H. Marshall, V. Rabens, and C. Bennema, 86–104 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 93.

believe.<sup>61</sup> Bonney iterates the view of many scholars when saying that “the gift of the Spirit they now receive . . . is intended to bring about . . . belief in his divine identity.”<sup>62</sup> To support this view, commentators often appeal to a connection between John 20:22 and the creation account in Gen 2:7 (καὶ ἐνεφύσησεν εἰς τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ πνοὴν ζωῆς),<sup>63</sup> saying that the impartation of life (i.e., “belief”) is connected with the giving of the Spirit.<sup>64</sup> However, several observations suggest that Jesus’ gift

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<sup>61</sup> W. Bonney, *Caused to Believe*, vol. 62, BI (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 157; R. E. Brown, *The Gospel of John: XIII–XXI*, AB (London: Chapman, 1972), 1041.

<sup>62</sup> Bonney, *Caused*, 157.

<sup>63</sup> Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 1037; Lincoln, *John*, 498; R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, vol. 3 (London: Burns & Oats, 1982), 325; F. J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 4, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1998), 535; X. Léon Dufour, *Resurrection and the Message of Easter* (London: Chapman, 1974), 185; Haenchen, *John 2*, 211; Lindars, *John*, 612; Barrett, *John*, 474.

<sup>64</sup> Discussions about the timing of John 20:22 are not relevant to this thesis. However a few comments here are noteworthy. Scholars who see the giving of the Spirit as a temporally-marked, immediate action are: G. Johnston, *The Spirit-Paraclete in the Gospel of John*, vol. 12, SNTS (Cambridge: CUP, 1970), 10, 11, 16, 49, 57; Haenchen, *John 2*, 211; Schnackenburg, *John*, 325; Lindars, *John*, 612; Moloney, *John*, 535; Léon Dufour, *Resurrection and the Message of Easter*, 186; Barrett, *John*, 474–75. Brown, *John XII–XXI*, 1038, cites only Grotius, Tholuck, and Theodore as open to the possibility that this giving of the Spirit in 20:22 is a symbolic act, referring to the disciples’ empowerment at the commencement of their ministry described in 20:23. I do not comment on the “symbolic” nature of this action here, but only believe the *timing* of John 20:22 is an unquestioned assumption by many scholars and recent advances in Greek linguistics make this certitude problematic for the following reasons:

- A. This passage has no temporal conjunctions such as ὅταν, ἕως, ἄχρι, μέχρις, or ὅσκις to add temporal “markers” to 20:22–23. Thus, because the imperative mood gives no indication of the timing of the event and there are no temporal indicators, John 20:21 is not grammatically decisive with respect to the chronology of the giving of Holy Spirit.
- B. Porter shows that the Imperative mood (e.g., λάβετε πνεῦμα ἅγιον) is temporally ambiguous.<sup>64</sup> Research on Greek linguistics is univocal on the temporal ambiguity of the imperative mood. McKay, for example, says, “time is even less important in the imperative than in other moods; logically it cannot be past or present, and it makes no difference to the aspect whether immediate or distant future, or actual or general time is implied.” K. L. McKay, “Aspect in Imperative Constructions in NT Greek,” *NovT* 27 (1985), 207.
- C. Scholars frequently parallel John 20:22 with John 1:33 where Jesus is called one who will “baptize with the Holy Spirit, asserting therefore that this must be an example of Jesus baptizing the disciples then and there.”<sup>64</sup> However, the question of whether 20:22 refers to the immediate filling of the Spirit is not solved by appealing to John 1:33, since this baptism could happen immediately in John 20 or in the future—in either case Jesus has still “baptized” the disciples with the Holy Spirit.
- D. The verb ἐνεφύσησεν is universally translated in lexicons as “to breath in/upon” with the prepositional idea (in/upon) built into the lexeme.<sup>64</sup> Ἐμφυσάω is a ἅπαξ in the NT, although it appears seven times in the OT (LXX). Of these seven occurrences, four have accompanying prepositions and the remaining three have corresponding nouns serving as indirect objects and therefore in the dative case, in which the prepositional idea is part of the noun not the verb.<sup>64</sup> John’s 20:22 contains this anomalous usage without a dative or an accompanying preposition (e.g., εἰς or ἐπὶ).<sup>64</sup> Therefore it should not be automatically assumed that the “breathing” is *on* or *into* the disciples, although it is universally translated this way.

of Spirit to his disciples refers to their empowerment for future ministry not the disciples' belief in the risen Jesus.

1. In John 20:17 Jesus clearly considers the disciples believers already when he tells Mary, δὲ πρὸς τοὺς ἀδελφούς μου καὶ εἶπε αὐτοῖς· ἀναβαίνω πρὸς τὸν πατέρα μου καὶ πατέρα ὑμῶν καὶ θεὸν μου καὶ θεὸν ὑμῶν.
2. John 20:22 records Jesus' command to receive the Holy Spirit (λέγει αὐτοῖς· λάβετε πνεῦμα ἅγιον) is immediately followed, not by a description of the life that the Spirit brings, but of the disciples' future ministry in which they will be Jesus' representatives in bringing life and judgment to others (John 20:23, ἂν τινῶν ἀφῇτε τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἀφέωνται αὐτοῖς, ἂν τινῶν κρατῇτε κεκράτηνται).
3. Bennema's work on the role of the Spirit shows from John 7:37–38 that “Jesus is the source of ‘living water’” *and* that believers become a “derivative source.”<sup>65</sup> That is, although water is frequently used to denote “life” in John's Gospel, it is not exclusively used for this purpose.<sup>66</sup>
4. Levison and Bennema both demonstrate the connection between ἐμφυσάω and concepts of “re-creation.”<sup>67</sup> However, each arrives at a different conclusion. For Levison, this re-creative act is one of *filling* with the Spirit, parallel with the way “witness, proclamation of repentance and forgiveness, and the move from Jerusalem to all nations

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<sup>65</sup> C. Bennema, *The Power of Saving Wisdom: An Investigation of Spirit and Wisdom in Relation to the Soteriology of the Fourth Gospel*, WUNT 2.148 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 195.

See also Bennema, “Giving: Another Round,” 89–90.

<sup>66</sup> Bennema makes a compelling case that the giving of the Spirit in John is a process, parallel with that of Jesus' glorification.

<sup>67</sup> J. Levison, *Filled with the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 367–72; Bennema, “Giving: Another Round,” 93–96.

will comprise the thematic center of the book of Acts.”<sup>68</sup> Bennema says that the “fuller giving of the Spirit in 20:22 *completes* or *secures* the disciples salvation or life-giving relationship with Jesus/God.”<sup>69</sup> He then approaches Levison’s conclusion with, “I thus suggest that ‘to receive the Holy Spirit’ signifies the start of a new relationship with the Spirit or the start of a new nexus of activities by the Spirit.”<sup>70</sup> This latter statement seems wholly in line with John’s usage and the ἐμψυσάω/re-creation connection. Bennema’s former statement regarding the “completion” or “securing” of salvation seems to blur the lines of distinction that John’s Gospel maintains between salvation and the giving of the Spirit in John 20:22.<sup>71</sup>

To state this point again, Jesus’ giving of the Spirit in John 20:22 does not concern the disciples’ status as believers in Jesus but more their empowering for future ministry and possibly their new experience with the Spirit.<sup>72</sup> The Spirit’s role in John 20:22 is a foreshadowing of what is to come and does not present the fullness of the Spirit’s work in this context. Schnackenburg’s observation supports this view,

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<sup>68</sup> Levison, *Filled*, 367.

<sup>69</sup> Bennema, “Giving: Another Round,” 97.

<sup>70</sup> Bennema, “Giving: Another Round,” 97–98, quoting M. Turner, “The Concept of Receiving the Spirit in John’s Gospel,” *VE* 10 (1977): 24–42, 25–26, 33–34.

<sup>71</sup> John’s Paraclete is indeed connected with salvation (See John 3:5; 6:63). However, does the Paraclete’s role *in this context* have salvific connotations? I do not think it does.

<sup>72</sup> N. Farelly, *The Disciples in the Fourth Gospel*, WUNT 2.290 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 227, writes, “The gift of the Spirit provided the disciples with a much deeper understanding of Jesus’ person and ministry . . . [yet] such newfound understanding was first and foremost to qualify them for their ministry as witnesses.” Levison, *Filled*, 367. Michaels, *John*, 1010, has a dissenting view of Jesus’ breathing. Because Jesus had just shown the disciples “his hands and side to verify who he is and the reality of his death. Here [the author] introduces a second act of verification: ‘he breathed’ . . . What does breathing verify? That he is alive.” Brown, *John XII–XXI*, 1035, also links Jesus’ “peace to you” statements with giving of Holy Spirit. Because Jesus says “peace” before giving Holy Spirit in 20:22, he sees Holy Spirit as a direct application of Jesus’ call for “peace.” However, this connection is conjectural as well, since the Spirit is mentioned only once among these three “peace” occurrences and a connection can only be inferred.

“The effect of the Spirit in the sense of the Paraclete is not yet focused upon.”<sup>73</sup> The Spirit is not an agent by which the disciples’ salvation is “completed” or “secured” in the presence of the resurrected Jesus. Rather, the Spirit is the entity by which their future *role* is characterized.

Lastly, an important detail of this scene is that it is *Jesus* who gives his followers the Spirit for empowerment in ministry. The significance of John’s Paraclete notwithstanding, Jesus is the one who negotiates Spirit-filling on behalf of his followers. Therefore the entire scene in 20:21–23 should be understood as a depiction of the God-given authority of Jesus as he enables and develops the future role of his followers in ministry. The specific meaning of this “forgiveness” offered by Jesus’ followers is not as important as the fact that Jesus gives them this authority in the first place. Before Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit on them, he compares the father’s commission of Jesus with Jesus’ commission of the disciples (20:21, καθὼς ἀπέσταλκέν με ὁ πατήρ, κἀγὼ πέμπω ὑμᾶς). This authority to forgive sins would then mirror Jesus’ authority to do the same as well (cf. 9:39–41).

### 3. “Do Not Be Unbelieving, But Believing” (John 20:27)

Jesus’ admonition to Thomas may indicate that Thomas places undue stress on having a personal experience of the risen Jesus, however also implied is a rebuke of a “deep-rooted mistrust” on the part of Thomas towards the disciples testimony.<sup>74</sup> Many scholars see Jesus as exhorting Thomas to become a believer in this interaction.

Bonney’s monograph *Caused to Believe* takes μὴ γίνου ἄπιστος ἀλλὰ πιστός (John

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<sup>73</sup> Schnackenburg, *John*, 326.

<sup>74</sup> Farelly, *Disciples*, 122–23. I am not prepared to agree entirely with Farelly, that Jesus’ rebuke of Thomas is entirely a mistrust of the disciples’ testimony, because Jesus’ beatitude in John 20:29 seems to place Thomas’ unbelief also in the realm of his need for a tactile experience of the risen Lord.

20:27) as an injunction to become a believer. However, earlier in John 21 Jesus recognizes all the disciples as “brothers” and fellow believers in God (John 20:17).<sup>75</sup>

Bennema makes a more convincing case that Jesus’ response to Thomas is an exhortation to believe without requiring an experience of Jesus to do so.<sup>76</sup> Jesus’ καὶ μὴ γίνου ἄπιστος ἀλλὰ πιστός (John 20:27) coupled with his beatitude about those who believe without seeing (John 20:29) show that Thomas’ precondition for belief—a personal revelatory experience of Jesus—is what Jesus is addressing.<sup>77</sup> Bennema continues by referring to Jesus’ beatitude as an encouragement “to a steadier faith that is less dependent on the concrete, touchable, and physical and more rooted in the trustworthy eyewitness testimony of John’s Gospel” (John 21:24).<sup>78</sup>

Thus, John’s Gospel does not emphasize the importance or centrality of revelatory experiences for reverence for Jesus and Jesus commends reverence for himself that is based on the testimony of his followers. However, Jesus also delivers an ultimatum to Thomas, that belief in his resurrection is now required for continued inclusion in to the community of believers.<sup>79</sup>

#### **4. The Parabolic Catch of Fish (John 21:1–14)<sup>80</sup>**

John uses the miraculous catch of fish to characterize the nature of the disciples’ forthcoming ministry—one in which Jesus’ commissions his disciples, and especially

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<sup>75</sup> Bonney, *Caused*, 131.

<sup>76</sup> C. Bennema, *Encountering Jesus* (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2009), 164–69.

<sup>77</sup> Bennema, *Encountering*, 169.

<sup>78</sup> Bennema, *Encountering*, 169.

<sup>79</sup> Contra Farely, *Disciples*, 124–26, who sees Jesus’ reproof more as “disapproval” not a harsh rebuke, and situates Jesus’ statement entirely in the arena of Thomas’ belief of the disciples’ testimony. He says that Thomas is called, “fundamentally to trust the testimony of the disciples and to take upon himself the responsibility to take part in the witnessing activity of his fellow disciples.”

<sup>80</sup> Evans, *Resurrection*, 118, parallels John 21 with Luke’s Emmaus story.

Peter, to bring new followers into the community.<sup>81</sup> Thus, Jesus’ actions in John 21:1–14 show his followers how both Jesus and his people will be engaged in his mission after his resurrection.<sup>82</sup> Jesus discloses for his followers what their “sending” would entail—that is, the ingathering of believers in Jesus in the mission to preach forgiveness (John 20:23). Showing the “great number” of people influenced by the disciples’ ministry seems to be the purpose of the “153 fish,” though the number may have added significance as well.<sup>83</sup> The sheer size of this catch is repeated four times in this passage (John 21:6, 8, 11a, 11b), indicating the scale of their success.

Therefore, John 21:1–14 reveals to Jesus’ followers how both Jesus and his people will be engaged in his mission after his resurrection. The disciples will be the “fishermen,” and Jesus remains committed to and empowering of the task he gives his followers. And the extent to which his disciples will themselves need to be committed to the task is the content of the next and final revelatory act of God in John’s Gospel.

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<sup>81</sup> See J. S. Webster, *Ingesting Jesus: Eating and Drinking in the Gospel of John* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

<sup>82</sup> Bauckham, *Testimony*, 280–81. John 21:1 and 14 bookend the passage as a further self-revelation of Jesus to his disciples (Μετὰ ταῦτα ἐφανερώσεν ἑαυτὸν πάλιν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τοῖς μαθηταῖς ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης τῆς Τιβεριάδος· ἐφανερώσεν δὲ οὕτως . . . τοῦτο ἤδη τρίτον ἐφανερώθη Ἰησοῦς τοῖς μαθηταῖς ἐγερθεὶς ἐκ νεκρῶν). Michaels, *John*, 1031. John’s use of “again” (πάλιν) provides some continuity with “revelations” earlier recorded, as does the reference to the “third” revelation in 21:14. Codex Sinaiticus moves πάλιν before ἑαυτὸν. Codex W Ψ pc place πάλιν after ὁ Ἰησοῦς. P<sup>c</sup> sy<sup>s</sup> sa pbo bo<sup>ms</sup> eliminate it. However, the strength of the witnesses lies in the current reading (A L Θ 0250 f<sup>1,13</sup> 33 ℣). Cf. Haenchen, *John* 2, 222. Instead of being a further *sign*, this third self-revelation of Jesus is parallel with the self-revelations of 20:19–29, in which Jesus appears to the disciples and states the implications of the resurrection (20:21–23, 27–28). Bauckham, *Testimony*, 274, cf. John 2:18–19; Although the resurrection itself is considered a “sign” (σημεῖον) for John, all of which “manifest Jesus’ glory so that people may believe in him,” the final verses of John 20 differentiate these self-revelations from “signs” performed for his disciples (20:30, σημεία ἐποίησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐνώπιον τῶν μαθητῶν [αὐτοῦ]). Bauckham distinguishes 20:30 (Πολλὰ μὲν οὖν καὶ ἄλλα σημεία ἐποίησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς) from 21:25 (ἄλλα πολλὰ ἃ ἐποίησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς), the former making John 2–20 a catalogue of seven signs.

<sup>83</sup> E.g., there are 153 fish: Bauckham, *Testimony*, 271–84, in a chapter called, “The 153 Fish and the Unity of the Fourth Gospel,” argues that the number of fish caught is a *gematria*, an instance in which the correspondence of 153 with the words of the Hebrew alphabet bear significance for the author of John’s Gospel.

## 5. “Do You Love Me?” (John 21:15–24)

This closing scene defines love for Jesus in terms of commitment to his community and his cause. First, Jesus’ three-fold question to Simon Peter<sup>84</sup> introduces three “if-then” statements—if Peter loves Jesus, Peter will express this love by caring for Jesus’ “flock.”<sup>85</sup> In fact, John 8–17 includes a few passages in which “love” is the distinguishing mark of true discipleship.<sup>86</sup> In light of the fact that Peter’s threefold denial of Jesus is recalled in context,<sup>87</sup> Jesus’ reconfirmation of Peter’s allegiance to Jesus and his movement is logical.

Second, although this passage is certainly about Peter’s appointment as the “shepherd of the flock,” Jesus first and foremost interprets Peter’s role as a manifestation of his love for *Jesus* not his people.<sup>88</sup> Peter’s mission and affection for Jesus are here merged, and yet Peter’s commitment to the community demonstrates Peter’s love for Jesus, not the other way around.

<sup>84</sup> Michaels, *John*, 1042, notes that Jesus’ repetition of “Simon of John” (21:15–17) is a reference to John 1:42, where Jesus’ changes Simon’s name. Michaels is unsure if “Simon of John” is an allusion “to Simon’s father in order to distinguish him from some other Simon, or whether he is simply reminding him that he was John’s disciple before he met Jesus.” A third possibility is that Jesus could be reminding Peter of the days when he was called to Jesus, as if to say, “Let’s start over again” as he reinstates the disciple.

<sup>85</sup> John 21:15, 16, ἀγαπᾶς με; 17, φιλεῖς με; Michaels, *John*, 1043: John’s two words for “love” (φιλεῖν and ἀγαπᾶν) and “sheep/lambs” are used interchangeably in the Gospel (cf. 3:35 and 5:20; 14:15 and 16:27; 11:3 and 11:5; 13:23 and 20:2).

<sup>86</sup> John 8:42, εἰ ὁ θεὸς πατήρ ὑμῶν ἦν ἠγαπᾷτε ἂν ἐμέ; 10:17, Διὰ τοῦτό με ὁ πατήρ ἀγαπᾷ ὅτι ἐγὼ τίθην τὴν ψυχὴν μου; 13:35, ἐν τούτῳ γνώσονται πάντες ὅτι ἐμοὶ μαθηταί ἐστε, ἐὰν ἀγάπην ἔχητε ἐν ἀλλήλοις; 14:15, εἰ ὁ θεὸς πατήρ ὑμῶν ἦν ἠγαπᾷτε ἂν ἐμέ; 14:21, ὁ ἔχων τὰς ἐντολάς μου καὶ τηρῶν αὐτάς ἐκεῖνός ἐστιν ὁ ἀγαπῶν με; 14:23, ἐὰν τις ἀγαπᾷ με τὸν λόγον μου τηρήσει; 14:28, εἰ ἠγαπᾷτέ με ἐχάρητε ἂν ὅτι πορεύομαι πρὸς τὸν πατέρα; 14:31, ἀγαπῶ τὸν πατέρα; 15:9, Καθὼς ἠγάπησέν με ὁ πατήρ, κἀγὼ ὑμᾶς ἠγάπησα; 15:13, μείζονα ταύτης ἀγάπην οὐδεὶς ἔχει, ἵνα τις τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ θῇ ὑπὲρ τῶν φίλων αὐτοῦ; 16:27, αὐτὸς γὰρ ὁ πατήρ φιλεῖ ὑμᾶς, ὅτι ὑμεῖς ἐμὲ πεφιλήκατε καὶ πεπιστεύκατε ὅτι ἐγὼ παρὰ [τοῦ] θεοῦ ἐξῆλθον; 17:23, ἠγάπησας αὐτοὺς καθὼς ἐμὲ ἠγάπησας; 17:24, ἠγάπησάς με πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου; 17:26, ἢ ἀγάπη ἦν ἠγάπησάς με ἐν αὐτοῖς ἢ κἀγὼ ἐν αὐτοῖς.

<sup>87</sup> Michaels, *John*, 1035, affirms this, observing that the “charcoal fire” is the same as the fire over which Peter denies Jesus (18:18, 25).

<sup>88</sup> Lincoln, *John*, 518; Farely, *Disciples*, 102–104 The meaning of “more than these” (21:15) is irrelevant for this thesis. Peter’s love for Jesus is the focus, regardless of the object of this comparison.



Third, Jesus says Peter's martyrdom will be a consequence of "loving" Jesus and identification with him (John 21:18–19).<sup>89</sup> That is, the mission to which Jesus calls Peter will lead to the same dismal death Jesus himself experienced. Not only does the text say this in 21:18–19, but the phrase "glorify God" is even one that Jesus uses for his own death throughout the Gospel (John 12:28; 13:31; 17:1).<sup>90</sup> In this way, this revelatory act of God involving the risen Jesus and Peter continues to focus on the nature of the mission to which Jesus calls the disciples and especially Peter.

Thus, Jesus shows Peter, that "love" for him will express itself in care for Jesus' people and commitment to Jesus' cause. More than the Synoptic Gospels, whose resurrection narratives mainly record the disciples' coming to believe in the risen Jesus with only general remarks about the disciples' future mission (i.e., Matt 28:16–20; Luke 24:47–49), John 21 provides a more detailed account of what belief in Jesus ultimately entails.

### **Summary of Content of John's Resurrection Account**

The content of John's resurrection experiences shows that the author is slightly less preoccupied with scriptural fulfillment (so Luke) or in Jesus' own declarations of authority (so Matthew). Rather, John's primary interest is in demonstrating the importance of the resurrection for participation in the community of faith and success in Jesus' mission to the world. He does this by offering them peace, the Paraclete, the parabolic catch of fish, and by challenging his disciples to pursue his "sheep." The responses of his followers as they witness these events are covered below.

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<sup>89</sup> The specific type of death Peter would experience is unclear (Lincoln, *John*, 518) and irrelevant to this thesis.

<sup>90</sup> Michaels, *John*, 10:49.

*Responses of Jesus' Followers*

**1. Incomplete Belief (John 20:1–18)**

Mary Magdalene is the central figure of the first eighteen verses of John 20, and exhibits a variety of responses as she encounters the angels and the risen Jesus at the tomb.<sup>91</sup> Léon Dufour calls these responses a “progressive transformation.”<sup>92</sup> Three times in these few verses, Mary attributes the empty tomb to the work of thieves (John 20:4, 13, 15) and even replies in-kind to the two angels and to Jesus himself.<sup>93</sup> Bonney describes Mary’s reaction as one of “pure worldly reasoning. She sees no evidence of hope, only evidence of some further outrage against her Lord. . . . Remarkably, Mary’s incomprehension persists even when she turns around and directly eyed her risen Lord.”<sup>94</sup> Farely adds, “She had yet to understand that Jesus could rise, and indeed already had risen.”<sup>95</sup> Thus, some details in these first few verses of John 20 portray Mary in a somewhat negative light as far as belief in Jesus is concerned.<sup>96</sup>

Although John 20 does not describe the followers of Jesus in the most flattering light, the first verses of the chapter also do not portray them in an entirely negative way either. The clearest example of the positive dimensions of John’s portrayal is in Jesus’ reply to Mary in John 20:17, “I am rising to my father and your father; and to my God and your God” (ἀναβαίνω πρὸς τὸν πατέρα μου καὶ πατέρα ὑμῶν καὶ θεόν

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<sup>91</sup> Peter and the beloved disciple show up and depart without ever seeing an angel or the risen Jesus.

<sup>92</sup> Léon Dufour, *Easter*, 176, also parallels Mary’s initial blindness to Jesus with that of the Emmaus men in Luke 24.

<sup>93</sup> R. E. Brown, *A Risen Christ in Eastertime: Essays on the Gospel Narratives of the Resurrection* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1991), 71.

<sup>94</sup> Bonney, *Caused*, 148, 151.

<sup>95</sup> Farely, *Disciples*, 156.

<sup>96</sup> Evans, *Resurrection*, 122, sees a contrast between Mary’s ραββουνι and Thomas’ ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου, suggesting that the former “indicates a presumption that Jesus has returned to his former life with men . . . [and therefore] it may be the immediate occasion for the next words, ‘Do not touch me.’” Léon Dufour agrees when saying, “Remarkable as it is, [Mary’s response] does not go beyond what the disciples replied at the beginning of Jesus’ public life: ‘Rabbi (which means Teacher), where are you staying?’ (1:38).”

μου καὶ θεὸν ὑμῶν). Here, Jesus counts Mary and the disciples as part of the people of God, whose father and God is the same as that of Jesus. Similarly, Jesus refers to the disciples as his “brothers” earlier in the same verse.

Therefore, instead of seeing Jesus’ followers in an entirely positive or negative light, John’s Gospel seems to portray their belief in Jesus as *in-process*. This explains the linkage between “believing” at the empty tomb and yet failing to understand the Scriptures (John 20:8–9). Witherington’s observation about John’s use of πιστεύω is helpful, “we have seen [in John] various examples where the verb *pisteuo* . . . can mean a true but inadequate faith in Jesus, a faith that falls short of belief in or understanding of Jesus as a crucified and risen messiah (cf. 2:23–24; 12:42–43; 20:8).”<sup>97</sup> That is, even in the presence of their risen Lord, Jesus’ disciples continue to struggle to be entirely faithful to him.<sup>98</sup>

## 2. Recognizing Jesus (John 20:16, 20, 28; 21:7)

The “moments of recognition” of John 20–21 have one thing in common: in each scene Jesus’ followers recognize him only after he has first initiated to them.<sup>99</sup> These four instances depict characters that at first do not recognize Jesus but later correctly identify him. In the first, Mary turns to see Jesus and thinks he is the gardener (John 20:14–15, οὐκ ᾔδει ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστίν . . . ἐκείνη δοκοῦσα ὅτι ὁ κηπουρός ἐστίν). Then, “Jesus, calling her by name (Μαριάμ, 20:16), graciously opens her eyes to his

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<sup>97</sup> Witherington, *Wisdom*, 325.

<sup>98</sup> G. C. Nicholson, *Death as Departure*, SBLDS 63 (Chicago: Scholars, 1983), 69–71.

<sup>99</sup> I consciously avoid the term “recognition scenes” in this thesis because my research on these scenes is independent of and does not build on the research of K. B. Larsen, *Recognizing the Stranger: Recognition Scenes in the Gospel of John* (Leiden: Brill, 2008). Others have noticed the same pattern (e.g., R. A. Culpepper, *The Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983]), but Larsen’s work is the most recent and comprehensive. Larsen’s work does not, in my view, demonstrate a compelling case either that 1. such a pattern exists or that 2. knowledge of a pattern will influence one’s interpretation of the Fourth Gospel.

identity.”<sup>100</sup> Thus, “Mary reveals herself as one of the flock by responding in faith” to Jesus.<sup>101</sup> In the next two instances, Jesus shows the disciples his wounds and the disciples recognize him, with Thomas famously saying, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:20, 27–28).<sup>102</sup> In the final case, Jesus causes Peter and the other disciples to make a great catch of fish before the beloved disciple tells Peter, “It is the Lord!” (John 21:6–7).<sup>103</sup>

Commentators often place the above literary moments in the context of “conversion,” saying that (as characters go from not recognizing Jesus to recognizing him) they move from unbelief to belief.<sup>104</sup> The classic example is Thomas in John 20:24–29, who pledges never to believe (οὐ μὴ πιστεύσω) apart from the physical recognition of the risen Jesus. Jesus’ response to Thomas in 20:29 makes the post-resurrection recognition of him a matter worthy of πιστεύω-language (λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· ὅτι ἐώρακάς με πεπίστευκας; μακάριοι οἱ μὴ ἰδόντες καὶ πιστεύσαντες).<sup>105</sup> Thomas’ failure to believe without first seeing Jesus is criticized by Jesus in favor of those who believe without seeing (i.e., the beloved disciple in 20:8). Thus, Lincoln concludes “Thomas comes to faith . . . [and moves] from unbelief to belief.”<sup>106</sup>

However, these “moments of recognition” do not seem to function as moments of “conversion” in John:

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<sup>100</sup> Farelly, *Disciples*, 158–59. Bennema, *Encountering*, 197, cites a number of scholars who relate Jesus’ calling Mary by name with the Good Shepherd discourse of John 10.

<sup>101</sup> D. A. Lee, *Flesh and Glory: Symbol, Gender, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (New York: Crossroads, 2002), 223.

<sup>102</sup> John 20:20, 27–28, ἐχάρησαν οὖν οἱ μαθηταὶ ἰδόντες τὸν κύριον. . . . ἀπεκρίθη Θωμᾶς καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ· ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου. Evans, *Resurrection*, 117–18.

<sup>103</sup> John 21:6–7, βάλετε εἰς τὰ δεξιὰ μέρη τοῦ πλοίου τὸ δίκτυον, καὶ εὐρήσετε. . . . ὁ κύριός ἐστιν.

<sup>104</sup> Lincoln, *John*, 502–03.

<sup>105</sup> Witherington, *Wisdom*, 325, has noted the following passages as those in which John uses πιστεύω to refer to devotion to Jesus, but to varying degrees: cf. 2:23–24; 12:42–43; 20:8.

<sup>106</sup> Lincoln, *John*, 503. Witherington, *Wisdom*, 344, doubts the “status” of Thomas in the Johannine community of faith before Thomas’ declaration in 20:28. Barrett, *John*, 425; A. F. Loisy, *Le Quatrième Évangile* (Nourry, 1921), 511; H. Van den Bussche, *Jean* (Desclée de Brouwer, 1973), 553–54; H. Wenz, “Sehen und Glauben,” *ThZ* 17 (1961), 17–25 with Lincoln all suggest that Thomas was never a believer.

1. In 20:17, prior to the disciples' recognition of Jesus, Jesus tells Mary to report his ascension to his "brothers" (ἀδελφός), that he is yet to ascend to "my father and your father, my God and your God" (ἀναβαίνω πρὸς τὸν πατέρα μου καὶ πατέρα ὑμῶν καὶ θεόν μου καὶ θεὸν ὑμῶν). The possessive pronouns are plural in this statement, indicating that Mary, her compatriots with her,<sup>107</sup> and the disciples are already all fellow devotees of God.<sup>108</sup>
2. If these recognitions of Jesus are Johannine "conversion" experiences, then for Peter and the beloved disciple, John 21:7 would constitute a second "conversion," after their first in John 20:19–20.
3. If the moments of recognition were conversion experiences, John would likely have described all these events using πιστεύω. Instead, the Thomas pericope is the only one of the four that talks about "faith." None of the other instances in which characters do not recognize Jesus and later recognize him employ πιστεύω.<sup>109</sup>

Therefore, these moments of recognition in John 20–21 cannot refer to the events in which Jesus' followers believe or are "converted." However, characters in these scenes are inspired to react positively toward Jesus *after he personally initiates to these characters subsequent to his appearance*. In this way, these revelatory experiences both are and are not decisive in producing reverence for Jesus. That is, the initial appearance of Jesus himself to his followers does not inspire a positive

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<sup>107</sup> One point to the contrary is that Mary delivers the report of the empty tomb, referring to herself and others with her, "we do not know where they have laid him" (ἡμεῖς τὸν κύριον ἐκ τοῦ μνημείου καὶ οὐκ οἶδαμεν ποῦ ἐθίκαν αὐτόν). However, this is a moot point considering Jesus' later reference to the disciples as "brothers" (21:17).

<sup>108</sup> Cf. John 6:68–69.

<sup>109</sup> The beloved disciple believes in 20:8 and mentions no moment of recognition. Thomas lacks faith in Jesus but believes when he is shown Jesus' wounds (20:27–28). These two disciples are thus compared, and the beloved disciple's "belief" (20:8) mentions no moment of recognition in John 20. Rather, the beloved disciple believes without actually seeing Jesus, based only on the sight of the burial cloths, whereas Thomas required a first-hand experience with the risen Jesus. This coincides with the widely supported theory that the beloved disciple is presented in John's Gospel as the "ideal author" (see Bauckham, *Testimony*, 73–92).

response in them, but his later initiations to them cause them to recognize him (John 20:16, 20, 28; 21:6–7).<sup>110</sup> The disciples are already considered brothers of Jesus (John 20:17a, ἀδελφός), who worship the same God and father (20:17b). And yet after Jesus initiates to them, they demonstrate a greater level of conviction about him.

### *John 20–21 in Context of the Entire Gospel*

As Bultmann first articulated and Michaels' structure of John's illustrates, the Fourth Gospel develops in such a way as to 1. Feature Jesus as God's Revealer and 2. Show Jesus to increasingly move "center-stage" as the story progresses. That is, Jesus is God's Revealer at the beginning of the Gospel and as the book develops Jesus is increasingly seen as possessing his own prerogatives in revealing himself. Thus, even in John 20:28, Thomas declares of Jesus, ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου, demonstrating how significant John's perception of Jesus' own revelatory authority truly is.

## Conclusion to John's Gospel

Revelatory acts of God alone do not produce reverence for Jesus in John's Gospel. The Baptist needs to have the descending dove explained to him (John 1:32–34), the crowds misperceive the voice from heaven in John 12:27–30, Mary does not recognize Jesus until he says her name (John 20:17), and both the disciples and Thomas are invited to physically examine Jesus' wounds before they respond with joy.

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<sup>110</sup> Farelly, *Disciples*, 227–28, makes a nice distinction between the faith and understanding. That is, although these moments do not constitute conversion experiences for the disciples, their understanding of what it means to know and follow Jesus is certainly deepened. Farelly carries out this distinction to an extreme, however, when he makes "faith, not understanding, . . . what is necessary to be made a partaker of eternal life."

However, when the Baptist receives an explanation and the risen Jesus initiates to his followers, these witnesses do respond positively.

Therefore, a few conclusions can be made from this research in John's Gospel:

1. **The revelatory acts of God do not enter John's narrative and supplant the need to understand Jesus *as revealed by Jesus*.** This may also be why John's religious experience accounts are on average more than twice as long as their Synoptic counterparts. John's religious and revelatory experience accounts average twenty verses in length, whereas the Synoptic religious and revelatory experiences accounts average between six and eight verses in length. The implication for John's Gospel is clear: revelation requires explanation, so John has fewer of these accounts and makes them on average greater in length.
2. **Johannine revelatory experiences have no illustrative power in and of themselves.** Bonney describes the incapacity of witnesses to respond positively to Jesus as "the world-bound perceptive abilities of the unbeliever," which may indeed be what John's Gospel is saying.<sup>111</sup> But even Jesus' forerunner, John the Baptist, needs revelatory explanation, illustrating that Johannine revelation is not "immediate" but must be interpreted for anyone. Even the resurrection appearances of Jesus are not rightly perceived at first.<sup>112</sup> Rather personal interaction with Jesus "assists" the witnesses for revelatory acts of God to produce reverence for Jesus.
3. **The story about "doubting Thomas" in John 20 demonstrates that reverence for Jesus without a revelatory encounter with him is now considered "blessed" (John 20:29).** That is, although Jesus' personal

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<sup>111</sup> Bonney, *Caused*, 131.

<sup>112</sup> Contra Bonney, *Caused*, 155, who says, "The experience of Jesus still alive after his crucifixion unveils for the disciples the full meaning of that which they previously could not fully comprehend."

interaction with Jesus prompts the recognition of Mary, the disciples, and Thomas, Jesus reiterates that revelatory acts of God will not be the foundation of the reverence of God's people for Jesus. Instead, the testimony of God's people will be the basis for future belief. Schlatter writes, "Wenn das Glauben ohne die Wahrnehmung entsteht, so entsteht es durch das Wort."<sup>113</sup> That is, reverence for Jesus in John's community is not achieved through *perception* (Wahrnehmung) or revelatory experience, but through the testimony of others who themselves interacted with the risen Jesus.<sup>114</sup> In other words, the community's long term nourishment and growth will come not from revelatory experience, but from "blind" faith in their risen Lord.

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<sup>113</sup> A. Schlatter, *Der Evangelist Johannes: wie er Spricht, Denkt und Glaubt*, ed. Dritte Auflage (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1960), 362.

<sup>114</sup> Bonney, *Caused*, 131, adds that, in Jesus' encounter with Thomas, John aims to "identify Jesus both as the object of Thomas' faith and as the one who initiates Thomas' movement towards faith."



## CHAPTER 5

# SYNTHESIS

### *Summary of Each Gospel*

#### **Mark**

Mark's Gospel offers the fewest revelatory acts of God of all the Gospels. Of these four accounts—the baptism, transfiguration, crucifixion phenomena, and the angelic announcement of the resurrection—only the baptism and the resurrection accounts provide a context in which a revelatory experience inspires reverence for Jesus. The phenomena in the transfiguration and crucifixion accounts are not responsible for any positive responses exhibited by the characters thereafter. However, Jesus becomes the focal point during these events and his resurrection in the final chapter is the spark that excites the women ahead of Jesus' meeting with his followers in Galilee.

Therefore, Markan revelatory acts of God are sometimes the context in which reverence for Jesus is engendered. Markan revelatory acts of God also depict an increasing focus upon Jesus, to whom God hands over the authority as the one to be “listened to.”

#### **Matthew**

Matthean revelatory acts of God are very different from those of Mark. The birth narrative begins the Gospel with four revelatory events that all produce positive responses to Jesus in the witnesses, as Joseph obeys every command of the dreams

and the magi obey the star's prompting to pay homage to Jesus. Matthew's third-person baptismal voice has no audience except Jesus. Matthew still shows Jesus' obedience to God's Spirit after the event, as Jesus is led into the desert for a confrontation with Satan.

Matthew's description of the transfiguration is richer in detail than in Mark or Luke, with stronger visual ties between Jesus and the divine cloud. During the event, Matthew does not mention Peter's ignorance in his response to the vision as does Mark, and the disciples listen to Jesus' command to "get up, and do not be afraid" as the phenomena depart. The subsequent context of the transfiguration does not spare the disciples of the Markan critiques already mentioned, but the transfiguration on the whole is a more positive event in Matthew. Matthew therefore shows a more "toned down" response to the transfiguration on the part of the disciples, with the initial response being positive and negative aspects coming only in the subsequent context.

Matthew's crucifixion explicitly says that the declaration of the centurion and those with him comes as a response to the revelatory phenomena at Jesus' death. Matthew's soldiers "saw the earthquake and everything that happened" and confess Jesus' divine sonship. This reverential response of these men is provoked by God's revelatory act on Jesus' behalf and marks a crucial difference in Matthew's portrayal of these events.

Matthew's resurrection account presents the one occasion in the Gospel in which a revelatory act of God produces a negative response in witnesses. The guards and the women at the tomb are sharply contrasted—both groups encounter the angel amidst the earthquake, and yet have opposite reactions. Later in the chapter when Jesus appears to his disciples, Matthew recounts the awkward tension between the disciples' worship and doubt.

Therefore, revelatory acts of God in Matthew engender positive responses in witnesses in every context in which they appear. However, Matthew is careful to allow for a variance in the positive responses given and even to allow for some characters to walk away *negatively* disposed to Jesus after the event. Perhaps this is the reason for Jesus' statements to the disciples in Matt 28:16–20, which place Jesus in the position of authority with regard to the future expansion of his community of followers, with baptism, teaching, and the universal power and presence of Jesus as the primary means by which community expands, not revelatory experience.

## **Luke**

The revelatory acts of God in Luke's Gospel begin with two appearances of Gabriel followed by that of a host of angels to some shepherds. These angelic appearances in Luke's birth narrative provide a great deal of christological content about Jesus' birth and engender positive responses in Mary and the shepherds. Zechariah first responds in unbelief before being reprovved and restored in his response to Gabriel's message.

The baptism and transfiguration in Luke's Gospel bear many of the same marks of the first two Gospels and are rich with christological information as the divine voice accentuates the importance of these events. The Lukan baptism produces a positive response in Jesus, who follows the Spirit's lead into the desert and rebuffs Satan's attempts to thwart his mission. The transfiguration, in which the disciples are present and involved, portrays these three men similarly to Mark and with no keener an understanding of Jesus than they have beforehand. Nevertheless, the Lukan transfiguration depicts the "handover of authority" from God to Jesus, as in Mark and Matthew. Luke adds his use of fear to this event, and whereas early in the Gospel

Luke reserves the notion of fear only for revelatory encounters with heavenly beings, the transfiguration shows Jesus is now the figure that prompts a response of fear.

Luke's crucifixion scene progresses this transfer of authority by making Jesus the revelatory focus of the event. Despite the darkness and the tearing of the veil, the centurion's response is a reaction to *Jesus*, not to these signs. However, the crowd responds remorsefully, "beating their breasts," reacting to both Jesus' death and the "failure of the sun." Although the crowds are hardly the focus of this passage, their positive response to Jesus in light of the revelatory phenomena is notable.

Luke's resurrection scene crystalizes the author's perspective on revelatory acts of God. These scenes detail the *process* by which Jesus' followers come to recognize and believe in him through the Scriptures. Jesus' followers recognize and reverence him as he opens their eyes and minds to understand the Scriptures in light of him.

Therefore, revelatory acts of God in Luke's Gospel are usually conduits for the transformation of characters with respect to Jesus. Even in the cases of the negative responses of Zechariah or the disciples at the transfiguration, later events reawaken these characters to what they misunderstand the first time around. In Zechariah's case, the subsequent event was his muteness. In the case of the Emmaus travelers or Jesus' disciples, Jesus himself had to open their eyes or minds to prompt a reverential response. In both cases, Luke shows that a subsequent act of illumination is needed to "finish the job" and inspire positive responses among these witnesses.

## **John**

John 12:27–30 records a voice from heaven saying, "I have glorified [my name], and I will glorify again" (John 12:28). Some of the crowd thinks the voice is thunder and others think an angel speaks to Jesus (John 12:29). In both cases, the crowd fails even to correctly perceive the audition, let alone provide an accurate interpretation. And yet

Jesus' claim that the voice spoke for the crowd's sake makes it undeniable that this revelatory event ineffectively discloses God's intentions to the crowd. The subsequent context shows John's answer to this dilemma, that this revelatory event is unintelligible to the crowd's senses as well as intellectual faculties (cf. John 12:38–40). This episode of John 12 is supported by the brief excursus made in John 1:32–34, in which John the Baptist recounts seeing the Spirit descend on Jesus. John's need for an explanation of the phenomenon illustrates that this vision is unintelligible even to the likes of the Baptist prior to a subsequent illuminating work. In this case, the Baptist was able to correctly perceive the action of the dove, but needed a divine interpretation to understand its significance for Jesus. In both cases, the revelatory experience did not have an "illuminating" effect on the audience, producing understanding of or reverence for Jesus that did not exist prior to the experience.

In John 20, Mary's failure to recognize Jesus at first sight further illustrates the author's ambivalence to these events for producing faith in Jesus. However, when Jesus says her name she recognizes him. Later, with both the disciples and then Thomas, each encounter requires more than visual contact (i.e., physical examination of his wounds) with Jesus to finally prompt the response that he is alive. Thus, revelatory acts of God in John's Gospel are indecisive in producing belief in Jesus. Rather, every revelatory act of God in John's Gospel seems to require some subsequent illumination in order to produce reverence for Jesus.

*Divergence among the Four Gospels<sup>1</sup>*

**1. The Big Picture**

Each of the four Gospels employs revelatory acts of God in unique ways for purposes specific to each author. Revelatory phenomena in John's Gospel are the most uniformly ineffective for producing reverence for Jesus at first sight. I say, "at first sight" because, when John's revelatory phenomena are followed up by a subsequent illumination, then characters do, in fact, respond positively to Jesus. However, John's Gospel is the most consistent of all the Gospels that "earthly" humans require "heavenly" enlightenment to understand the import of the phenomena they see.

In Mark's Gospel, half of the revelatory acts of God effectively produce reverence for Jesus and none of these requires a subsequent act of illumination to produce reverence for Jesus. Mark's narrative has the fewest of these events to begin with (even compared to John), and so his lesser emphasis on the revelatory acts of God is not surprising.

Luke's Gospel has the highest concentration of revelatory events, most of which are effective for inspiring characters to reverence Jesus. However, Luke's revelatory acts of God sometimes require a "subsequent illumination" (so Luke and John) for these to respond reverentially to Jesus.

Matthew's Gospel is the most emphatic about the effect of revelatory acts of God for inspiring witnesses to reverence Jesus. Throughout the Gospel, Matthean revelatory experiences accomplish their purpose, causing characters to respond positively to Jesus after the event. Matthew's only instance in which a revelatory event causes a *negative* response in characters is at the empty tomb, where the

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<sup>1</sup> This thesis has attempted a descriptive account of the role of revelatory experiences in the Gospels rather than prescriptive account of the way these accounts should be read or should influence the contemporary Church. Therefore, the approach taken and the methods employed sought first and foremost to understand how each Gospel uses revelatory events, and only after that to synthesize results or explore implications.

soldiers see the angel and later plot with the authorities to lie about the resurrection. This contrast between the women and the soldiers demonstrates that even in Matthew revelatory events are subject to the other factors that mitigate the outcome of the experience.

Therefore, the four Gospels all seem to have their own “angle” on revelatory acts of God and the way these events do or do not inspire reverence for Jesus. None of the Gospels chooses to leave these events out altogether. Therefore, each Gospel recognizes the importance of these events for demonstrating the plight of human beings for understanding the things of God.

## **2. Subjective Emphases**

Each of the four Gospels has varying levels of emphasis on the subjective aspect of revelatory encounters. Luke’s Gospel, with the extended responses in the birth narrative and the detailed account of the resurrection, seems to value the subjective side of revelatory encounters more highly than any other Gospel. John’s Gospel, with its emphasis on the individual’s response to Jesus and the disciples’ encounters with the risen Lord in John 20–21, follows Luke’s Gospel in the space it gives to the subjective.

However, Mark’s and Matthew’s Gospels are much less focused on the subjective element of revelatory experiences. Mark’s baptism, transfiguration, crucifixion, and resurrection are characteristically terse. Similarly, Matthew’s birth narrative records almost nothing of the verbal responses of Joseph or the magi to the events they see. Even in the resurrection account, Matthew does not record a single verbal response of the witnesses to any of the revelatory phenomena, but he only narrates their responses to these events.

These varying levels of subjectivity illustrate that ancient authors may or may not deem the subjective encounters of characters relevant to the themes they wish to convey. Luke and John are more concerned with the subjective encounters that characters have with the phenomena or with Jesus, as both authors emphasize the way individual characters react *to Jesus*. Matthew and Mark seem more interested in the works of Jesus and allow the responses of individuals to be a matter for the reader to infer.

### **3. God Transitions Authority to Jesus**

The development of the revelatory experience accounts in each of the Synoptic Gospels suggests a transfer of authority from God to Jesus as the narrative wears on. At each baptism account, God is the one performing all the actions and Jesus is the passive recipient. Then the transfiguration accounts all place Jesus “center stage” with Moses and Elijah and the voice tells the disciples to “listen to” Jesus. During the crucifixion accounts and into the resurrection accounts, the Synoptic Gospels generally place the emphasis entirely on Jesus as one who can speak and act on God’s behalf with God’s power to reveal.<sup>2</sup>

John, on the other hand, depicts no such transfer of authority, partly because John 1 affords Jesus the status as God’s Revealer from the very beginning. Of course, given the Johannine statements about the relationship between the Father and Son, God never entirely steps out of the picture. To the contrary, John 12:27–30 has Jesus appealing to God to glorify his name and God confirming his intent to carry on doing just that. Still, however, the lack of a baptism or transfiguration in John has a

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<sup>2</sup> I generalize here, recognizing that the Synoptic Gospels each have their own ways of accomplishing this, especially in the crucifixion and resurrection scenes.



profound impact on the contours of the narrative, and one such effect is to stave off the notion that Jesus develops into his role as God's Son.

#### **4. Characters that Reverence Jesus Are Not Free from Doubt**

The resurrection accounts of Matthew, Luke, and John are all in agreement about the way the believing community mixes reverence with doubt in their responses to the risen Jesus. Ellis states it nicely in his reflections on doubt in Matt. 28:17, “Discipleship may involve: both exaltation and depression, the confidence of Peter and also the precariousness of faith even in the attitude of worship.”<sup>3</sup> Followers of Jesus may be free from some of their human limitations as Jesus commissions them and gives them his authority and presence for ministry (Matt. 28:18–20; Luke 24:49; John 20:22), but even in front of the risen Jesus they struggle to fully believe. Although Mark's Gospel does not provide enough information to figure into these conclusions, Matthew, Luke, and John all support the idea that the ambivalent responses of Jesus' followers persist even after the resurrection—a reality, John implies, that will exist as long as there is a believing community (John 20:29).

### *Convergence among the Gospels*

#### **1. Revelatory Experiences Are Not Foolproof**

All four Gospels depict at least one revelatory experience in which witnesses respond negatively to the event, thereby showing that such phenomena are not guaranteed to produce reverence for Jesus. In fact, Mark, Luke, and John contain more than one instance in which revelatory events do not achieve an immediately intended effect. Therefore, these instances in which revelatory acts of God actually *repelled* some

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<sup>3</sup> Ellis, “Some Doubted,” 579.

characters and inspire positive responses in others demonstrate that, for all four Gospels, other factors mitigate the effects of these phenomena for engendering reverence for Jesus.

Also, revelatory acts of God are generally not told *second hand* within the Gospel narratives as a method for engendering reverence for Jesus.<sup>4</sup> That is, characters do not generally relay the contents of these experiences to other characters in an attempt to justify their responses to Jesus. Instead, revelatory events come and go, with unpredictable effect on the witnesses and generally without being spread around by these witnesses as a basis for following Jesus. One might say that the Gospel narratives do not use revelatory experiences “evangelistically” to testify about Jesus from one character to the next. That is, the revelatory acts of God may be the means by which witnesses themselves come to reverence Jesus, but these witnesses do not verbally relay their experiences to the same effect.

## **2. Discipleship is a Process**

One may wonder why the evangelists “chose to portray the disciples’ faith in such an ambiguous manner.”<sup>5</sup> All four Gospels characterize reverence for Jesus in this way, as much a process as an event. This does not negate the presence of exclusive insider and outsider categories in the Gospels as well.<sup>6</sup> However, the four Gospels show that,

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<sup>4</sup> Three exceptions are the magi’s resport to Herod (Matt. 2:1–10), the shepherds’ report of the angelic host (Luke 2:17–18), and the disciples telling Thomas about the resurrection appearance (John 20:25).

<sup>5</sup> Farelly, *Disciples*, 2.

<sup>6</sup> The ongoing battle between the Pharisees and Jesus/the disciples is a certain indication that such categories do exist for the evangelists. See W. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 84–94, and his discussion of the “language of belonging” in the earliest Christian communities.

“discipleship is not static but a vocation to be realized with contending forces bidding for one’s loyalty.”<sup>7</sup>

What is more, there are only a few instances in which reverence for Jesus among his followers expresses fully and unreservedly the content of the revelatory phenomena they witness. One example is Mary in Luke 1, whose revelatory experience of the angel Gabriel leads to a rich expression of reverence for God and his promises in Jesus. However, the responses of Zechariah earlier in the chapter as well as that of the disciples at the transfiguration show such expressions of faithfulness to be few and far between. Therefore, the Gospels are not utopian in their portrayal of characters’ responses to Jesus. Rather, they present a very “lifelike” picture of discipleship and one that is a perpetual struggle between belief and unbelief.

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<sup>7</sup> Ellis, “Some Doubted,” 578.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This thesis shows that the revelatory acts of God recorded in the canonical Gospels vary widely in their effectiveness for engendering faith in Jesus. None of the four Gospels presents revelatory experience as an infallible pointer to Jesus, as some characters witness revelatory phenomena and yet remain unchanged. Matthew's guards at the empty tomb are the clearest example, who see the angelic messenger and respond negatively to the event, running away to tell the authorities what happened.

The resurrection appearance accounts are the resounding exception to the above pattern. No character in the Gospels encounters the risen Jesus and leaves unchanged. Indeed, Luke goes as far as to say that the risen Jesus *compels* his followers to reverence him (Luke 24:31, 45). Interestingly, no unbeliever in the resurrection appearance narratives interacts with the risen Jesus. Rather, only those favorably disposed to Jesus are allowed to see him risen. And these, although ambivalent in their responses, do acknowledge him as risen and receive his call to carry the good news to others. Therefore, all the Gospels attest to the efficacy of God's revelatory act in the resurrection of Jesus and its significance in the community of Jesus' followers thereafter. Yet each Gospel approaches the nature of this phenomenon in its own way.

Therefore, regarding the revelatory acts of God in general, this thesis finds that the Gospels do not deploy these events programmatically to engender devotion to

Jesus in those who witness them. However, the resurrection event in particular may be distinguished from other revelatory acts of God in this regard as having unique significance among the witnesses for engendering faith in him.

## Implications

### *Christological Statements for Future Generations*

Although many revelatory experiences in the Gospels are not the stimulus for faith that one might expect, the visions and statements of God codify theological truths about Jesus for future generations of believers. That is, whether or not characters respond favorably to certain revelatory events in the Gospels, these accounts seem to function as theological “moments” and are opportunities for the author to say something important about the identity of Jesus. The Synoptic Gospels in particular use revelatory acts of God as theological moments in which God validates Jesus, regardless of how characters come to believe in him. John’s Gospel has less of a need for such theological “reflection,” since he avails himself of many such moments by including extended sections of Jesus’ teaching. For all four Gospels, the resurrection of Jesus offers nurturing hope to those “in the incubator of persecution and suffering.” In this way, these revelatory experiences in the Gospels encapsulate

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<sup>1</sup> J. R. D. Kirk, *Unlocking Romans: Resurrection and the Justification of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 15. See also J. D. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 1–22, who reacts strongly against both the historical confusion between immortality and resurrection, and also the idea that resurrection is connected with suffering (so, Kirk). Yet Levenson still maintains the necessary connection between the concepts of *resurrection* and *liberation from death*, “In the case of resurrection, the last word once again lies not with death—undeniably grievous thought it is—but with life . . . what overcomes [death] is nothing short of the most astonishing miracle, the Divine Warrior’s eschatological victory” (216).

God’s initiation of the “coming of a new age” and promise for final deliverance in Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

*The Relationship between “Evidence” and Faith*

The revelatory acts of God in the Gospels are often portrayed as phenomena visible and therefore accessible to everyone present (e.g., Matthew 28:1–7) and yet the Gospel show that “accessibility” is not a given. Rather, characters have widely divergent responses to the exact same phenomena. The implication of the Gospels is that “facts” are not neutral, “raw historical data.” Rather, history, like everything else, is interpreted. In the Gospels, a favorable response to Jesus after a revelatory event depends at least in part on the character’s predisposition toward or away from Jesus. No revelatory event alone is enough to inspire a favorable response to Jesus in a person without the eye-opening work of Jesus to cause that person to interpret both history and experience differently.<sup>3</sup>

However, neither is faith in Jesus disconnected from historical events. Again, the Gospels make a great effort to show the reader that these revelatory acts of God, and in particular the resurrection of Jesus, actually happened. Therefore, history and experience work together and, when aided by the mind-opening power of Jesus, make one able to both reverence Christ historically and to embrace him experientially even as one “takes up their cross” and follows (Luke 9:27).

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<sup>2</sup> F. Bovon, *Luke*, vol. 1, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002), 34.

<sup>3</sup> F. B. Watson, “He is Not Here: Towards a Theology of the Empty Tomb,” in *Resurrection*, eds. S. Barton and G. Stanton, 95–107 (London: SPCK, 1994), 106, appropriately comments to this by avoiding, “myopic positivisms that cannot see beyond the marshaling of so-called ‘historical evidence’ for or against the actuality of the raising of Jesus.”

*Criteria for Inclusion into the Community of Believers*

Lastly, I propose that the Gospels do imply in the resurrection appearances that something new is required for inclusion into their believing communities. That is, positive responses to the risen Jesus are necessary for admittance into the post-resurrection Jesus movement. Some scholars draw conclusions about whether “full faith” is possible at different points in the Gospel and especially prior to the resurrection.<sup>4</sup> Although this discussion is helpful at points, the Gospels seem to present the development of *criteria for inclusion* into the community of faith, as the disciples strive to keep up. The clearest example is the Johannine interaction between Jesus and Thomas, in which Jesus charges Thomas, “Do not be unbelieving, but believing.” In this passage, Thomas’ doubt about Jesus’ resurrection becomes a “non-negotiable” for the author, indicating what Thomas must believe to be considered part of John’s community of faith. The Synoptic Gospels provide such definition only by implication as the recognition of the bodily resurrection of Jesus is the foundation on which the future existence and ministry of the Jesus movement is based.

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<sup>4</sup> Farelly, *Disciples*, 2.

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